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THEY MET IN HEAVEN

BY

GEORGE H. HEPWORTH

AUTHOR OF "HIRAM GOLF'S RELIGION," ETC.

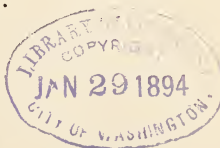


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WITH A GRATEFUL HEART
I DEDICATE THIS LITTLE BOOK
TO THE MEMBERS OF
THE FIRESIDE CLUB,
OF WOODBINE.

PREFACE.

IT would be an evidence of either weakness or conceit not to express my gratitude to the public for the cordial greeting it has extended to "Hiram Golf's Religion." I wrote the book as a tribute to a dear old man who firmly believed that all work is God's work, and that the toil of daily life, if done by consecrated hands, is never drudgery. "The little things of life are all great things," said Hiram to me one day; and I have never forgotten it. He used to declare that my frequent conversations with him were a help and an encouragement, but when I reach the other shore I shall be able to prove to him that the balance of indebtedness is on my side rather than his. The silent ministry of his humble life has drawn many a weary and way-worn heart to the Lord.

My publishers have asked me for other reminiscences of the "Shoemaker by the grace of God," and on looking over my note-books I find a rather full account of The Fireside Club and its discussions during the winter preceding the death of this remarkable man. Hiram was loved by every member of the club for his sterling honesty, his somewhat crude but always forcible way of expressing himself, and his unshaken faith in a Father who is with His children all the time.

The history of this club is contained in the following pages. There may be other Van Brunts in the world, souls wandering in the direction of the light but not reaching it, and if these find their way to the Cross they must needs thank Hiram, not me, for their new-found happiness. I am simply the chronicler of events, but Hiram's is the voice that gives good cheer.

THE AUTHOR.

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THEY MET IN HEAVEN.

CHAPTER I.

A FEW FRIENDS.

IT was the somewhat formidable necessity of earning a livelihood which forced me to spend the winter of 1889 in the little village of Woodbine, whose humble citizens are lulled to sleep by the rippling Cheroquee. I had been engaged to superintend certain dyeing processes, the secret of which is my stock in trade, for Phil & Khun, in whose woolen mills several hundred men and women find employment; but I sighed as I packed my trunks, and anticipated a very dreary time.

The six months of my stay, however, are not to be forgotten. The incidents that occurred seem now, as I look back upon them, like shuttles flying hither and thither through the warp and woof of time, weaving a fabric as rare and priceless as a piece of medieval tapestry.

How strangely things happen in this world ! What we look forward to with dread turns out, oftentimes, to be the delight of memory. I would have given half of my possessions—not worth much in solid cash, I must confess—if I could avoid this journey. Woodbine seemed the most undesirable spot on the globe, and I was in no amiable mood when I read the dispatch which ordered me to start at once.

A country village, “remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow.” Bleak hills, frowning skies, and impassable snowdrifts. Why not go to Labrador, or Alaska, or Spitzbergen, and have done with it? It was exile from the friends of many years, from all the pleasures of city life, the music of my favorite orchestra, the stimulat-

ing rumble of a thousand vehicles on the hard pavement, the unconscious tingling of nerves which the crowd in a great thoroughfare always produces. "Anything but Woodbine, with its farms, farmers, and icicles!" I inwardly exclaimed. "I shall die of ennui, become a mere fossil before spring, and hear of nothing more exciting than the latest news of Neighbor Cobb's cow, or the grocer's colt." I like the whirl of life, enjoy the friction of contact with my kind, and therefore looked on the Cherokee Valley as a sepulcher in which I was to be temporarily entombed.

But now, as I look back on those months, I find a resurrection rather than a burial. The experience I shrank from proved to be the most enjoyable and profitable of my life. I was like the Western miner who, by some good luck, stumbles on a pocket of ore at the very moment when he has concluded that there is no ore there.

Let me introduce the rare and gifted men whom it was my happiness to meet during that

memorable winter, and then I shall gladly assume the duties of a phonograph, through which you may listen to their golden words.

There was John Jessig, pastor of one of the churches, and an old classmate of mine at Harvard. We lost sight of each other when he took a course in theology and I a dive into the maelstrom of business. How I loved the fellow in those far-away days! He was a student with a conscience. When he entered the ministry, it was because he had something to say to the people. He examined the creed, the church, the Bible, as vigorously as Agassiz used to examine a new fish which some whaling captain had caught in the northern Atlantic.

"I know what others think of these things," he said to me just before we parted, "but I must find out what I think myself. I can't accept any one of them on hearsay. If I become convinced that creed, church, and Bible are necessary to an honorable life and to a proper preparation for the future, then I will enter the

ministry. If I am not convinced, I will apply for a clerkship somewhere."

And there he was in Woodbine, preaching to a hundred farmers and fifty mill hands. He had examined the foundations and was engaged in building on them. I can hardly tell you how surprised I was at meeting him; but my surprise was not equal to my delight. I was strolling along the single street of the village on the second day after my arrival, rather glum and down-hearted. A man came from one of the cottages, and, without casting a glance in my direction, walked away. There was something in his gait, in the swing of his arms, that immediately attracted my attention. I quickened my pace out of pure curiosity, wondering the while where I had seen him. My memory served me a bad trick; but then he had changed in the ten years since that dance on College Green. His shoulders had broadened, he was no longer the boy who delivered the valedictory, but a robust and full-grown man. Time had dealt with him

generously, but had so far disguised, or rather developed, him that instant recognition was impossible. At last, however, the revelation came, and when I was within a half-dozen rods I impulsively cried, "John!" and the next moment we were in each other's arms. After that Woodbine seemed more tolerable.

It was around the ample hearthstone in Jessig's little study that many of the incidents occurred which I am about to relate. Good hickory was the cheapest fuel to be had, for there was plenty of it in the woodlands back of the village; and as John's salary allowed no luxuries, he smilingly asserted that a cannel-coal is to a hickory fire what moonlight is to sunlight. The huge logs burned so cheerily and threw such a genial glow through the room that lamps could easily be dispensed with, and the enjoyment of those frosty evenings will never be surpassed until we gather in the other Home.

Then there was a saintly stranger with silver hair and deep-blue eyes—eyes like the sheen

of a sapphire. He was erect of figure, imposing in his personality, and bore his seventy years with gracious serenity. He had an introspective mien, as though this world had given him all it could and he was looking for better things in the Beyond. I often said to myself as I gazed at his face, "The present is his dream; the future is his reality. He is growing a little weary of to-day, and is thinking of to-morrow."

By general consent we addressed him as "the Master." He maintained the same calm demeanor at all times, and was unruffled by fickle circumstance. It was by no means the calmness of an indifferent or a sluggish soul, but that of one who has passed through the fire and been purified. At times I was even filled with awe, as though in the presence of a superior being. I hardly know why, but he always reminded me of the ocean as I have watched it from the shore on a summer afternoon. The waves rolled slowly and leisurely up the strand,

but how resistless they were, and what a sense of authority they gave me ! “ Quiet but omnipotent ! ” I have often said to myself, and then a voice from the depths has responded, “ Quiet *because* omnipotent ! ” Yes, there is a certain majesty in mental and spiritual quiescence when it results from problems that have been settled once for all.

Shall I ever forget my first ten minutes’ talk with the Master ? I said, with some show of irritation :

“ Dollars and cents are autocratic and remorseless. They have borne themselves in the imperative mood toward me, and therefore I am here. I am the slave of business.”

“ Let me congratulate you,” he replied, in rich, mellow tones, “ on the divine necessity of work. The world’s business is not only imperious but imperial. So is God’s providence, and so are the laws of nature. Commercial activity means manliness. It results, as it was evidently intended to do, in individual and national pros-

perity: therein it is imperial. Every one is forced by the pressure of circumstances to do his share of the general work, the penalty of neglect being poverty: therein it is imperious."

His words hit me hard. My work, then, was not drudgery, but duty. That was a new idea, and my petulant complaint shamed me. I cannot say whether at the time my cheeks flushed or not, but they do now as I recall the incident.

"I have a notion," he went on quietly, "that business, properly attended to, is an education. It is possible to learn from contact with our fellows certain profound secrets which textbooks cannot teach. The whirl of commercial transactions, the competitions of trade—though sometimes carried to a destructive limit—are God's university, from which one graduates only when Death hands him his diploma."

I was like a vessel at sea when the wind suddenly shifts and the sails are all taken aback. It staggers for a few minutes, until the crew with their merry "Ha, ya, boys!" haul the

yards to leeward, and then rushes once more through the laughing waves. The Master made me reel, for he was uttering very radical opinions; but still there was something alluring in his speech, and I said, "This man sees far and thinks deeply. He is not like other men, for he lives in two worlds, either of his own making or God's, I can't quite tell which as yet."

"If this diploma," he added, in a sort of soliloquy, "certifies that the bearer has been a faithful student, has made an honorable record, has bequeathed to society at large an example which it would be well for the younger generation to follow, has recognized his duties as well as his privileges, has helped his kind with one hand while achieving success with the other, he need have no fear when he knocks at the Golden Gate, for it was the Lord Himself who said, 'By their fruits ye shall know them.'"

I had been brought up to walk on the level, hard, smooth, macadamized highway of the dear old Athanasian Creed, and must confess

to being somewhat shocked. His words had a heterodox taste, and though I bowed politely, I am sure he detected my dissent; but he continued in a strain which rather exasperated my conservatism.

“ I have another notion,” he said, “ that business and religion were intended to complement each other. They are like different strands of a rope, which, united, hold the weight of the world. If religion is divorced from business, mankind suffer; if they are like man and wife, both of them necessary to a happy home, the other life throws its radiance on this life, and this life becomes the prophecy of another life. To be only a business man is to be only half a man. God bestows His blessing just as willingly on a warehouse as on a church. What is preached on Sunday amounts to little unless it is lived on Monday. The love of money is honorable; the passion for money is fatal. To combine getting with giving is to bring heaven and earth together; to get without giving is to

invite Satan to laugh in his sleeve. When the poor man and the rich man are brothers, then hospitals abound, asylums are built, charity prevails, and the world is happy ; when the rich man is an aristocrat and the poor man is a sycophant, the world chokes and gasps."

"The Church," I ventured to suggest, "would hardly approve of such strong statements."

"And more's the pity," he replied ; "but I think you are in error. At any rate, Christ approved of them, and that ought to satisfy us. If the people were taught that the prime object of religion is to make a noble character, and that a noble character is *prima facie* evidence of saving grace, consciously or unconsciously possessed, the multitude would shake hands with the pulpit. The clergy would then have the fulcrum which Archimedes sought, and could pry the earth out of its dullness and despair. As it is, the multitude and the pulpit are hardly within co-operative distance of each other. They are mutually courteous and form-

ally polite, but neither has the other's entire confidence. As a consequence, the multitude go their own way perversely, and the pulpit pleads in vain for a hearing."

This is what occurred at my first interview with the Master. He gave my old-fashioned ideas a terrible shaking up, and I felt for a time as though some one had exploded a pound of dynamite in my brain. He had, however, the bearing of a most gracious sovereign. He did not overwhelm me by his self-assertion, as the poor Switzer is buried under an avalanche, but seemed to be trying all the while to persuade me to become a genuine man, with personal convictions instead of prejudices, with opinions which I could put to the test and prove true.

Next in this little group of royal souls was Hiram Golf, saint and shoemaker. He was in some respects the most original, and in other respects the most lovable, creature I have ever met. Hiram mended a torn pair of brogans as reverently as he prayed, and seemed to regard

the one service as quite as important as the other. His crutch was his scepter, and his lap-stone a kind of lay pulpit. He was one of the elect few whose right hands do not know what good their left hands are doing. There were two witnesses, and only two, to his kindly deeds of charity—the dear Lord and the poor man who received the basket of provisions. A shoemaker and a high-priest!

They laid his body in the churchyard in 1892, and John Jessig was so hurt by the blow that he had to ask for a month's leave of absence. When the doctor told Hiram that his end was near, he faintly whispered, "That's good news. No crutches up yonder! It'll be kind o' strange at first, I reckon, but I'll soon feel to home, for I know quite a lot of people on the other side."

How shall I describe the last member of our company, who occupies a conspicuous position in this little story? Peter van Brunt had been visited by an affliction so terrible that my heart

stood still when we heard of it, and I noticed that even the Master's eyes were dim. From a cloudless sky the bolt came that ruined his home and left a scar on soul and body. He had fortune, social position, genius, a wife and a child. A shady nook in paradise had apparently been assigned to him. But in one short week two catastrophes occurred, and when I first saw him he reminded me of a huge tree that had stood in the path of a blizzard. He was riven, torn, disfigured, and hopeless to the point of despair. In his residence some accident had happened to the drainage, and between Monday and Saturday the boy and the mother were called to heaven. His desolation of heart was beyond expression. The sudden shock had benumbed him, but when the mental paralysis passed away and he realized the situation, he was for a time on the edge of insanity. A dismantled ship on the lee rocks, a magnificent edifice reduced to ashes by devouring flames—I could think of nothing else. He had

too much heart to be a Stoic, and too much manliness to drown his grief in dissipation; so he faced the facts, shivered with resistless emotion, and did the best he could.

To make matters still worse, his convulsing agony had roused the dormant energy of a disease which he had probably inherited. If he had been at peace with himself and with God, the malady might have remained forever in hiding; but during the rebellion that raged, these malign elements of his physical nature came to the surface and there intrenched themselves.

I cannot tell how close the connection may be between mind and body, but it has sometimes seemed to me that mental repose and bodily health are more nearly related than is generally supposed. Van Brunt was in a volcanic state of mind. I could not look into his haggard face without thinking of the French Revolution of '93, when the people lost their balance, repudiated both duty and justice in

their passionate outburst, and then built a guillotine on the Place de la Concorde. If poor France had steadfastly held to her ancient faith, had sought the Throne in prayer instead of pelting it with execrations, the frantic folly of Robespierre would have been impossible, and the brutal agonies caused by the so-called "Committee of Safety" would never have been written in blood on the page of history. When France lost her mind, the body-politic became diseased, and the pursuits of peace gave way to the mania for murder.

In like manner, if Van Brunt had had a cross to cling to as well as a cross to bear, I doubt if the physician would have shaken his head and sent his patient to the pine forests of Woodbine, knowing that the little village was on the way to a cemetery.

Faith came to him at last, however, and how it came and what results it produced are recorded in these pages. It came too late, though, to save his body. The edifice was

tottering to its ruin, and could no longer afford a safe shelter for the spirit. But the short afternoon of his life was bright and hopeful, and when the shadow fell he went forth to meet his dear ones with a smile on his lips. He bade us good-night "like one who wraps the drapery of his couch about him and lies down to pleasant dreams." It was not the sleep that knows no waking, but that quiet slumber from which one is roused by angel whispers to find that he is clothed upon with immortality and surrounded by those not lost but gone before.

Just before the farewell, he intrusted to my care the journal of incidents that occurred during his stay in Woodbine, and gave me permission to do what I thought best with it. It is the faithful mirror of the man's soul. It reflects the doubts which lashed him as with a whip of knotted cords, and also his gradual emancipation from them. I have read many of its pages with trembling lips, for there are traces of tears

on them still, and other pages with a sense of God's pitying and sympathetic presence. When I closed the little volume, it was with the feeling that the age of miracles has not yet slipped into the past. "I will be with you alway" includes the latter half of this nineteenth century.

CHAPTER II.

IN UTTER DARKNESS.

LET me now make you acquainted with Peter van Brunt, and with the pitiful circumstances against which he bravely struggled, by some quotations from his journal. There is many a soul, perhaps, breasting the same storm, and vainly looking for the light which after months of darkness filled his firmament with perfect day. If few have suffered as he did, few have rejoiced as he did. There is a metempsychosis by which one is literally born again, and it is possible that in this diary my friend has blazed a path which others may follow.

“October 6th. Well, here I am in Woodbine. It seems to me like a railway junction where I shall change cars for my family lot in

Forest Hills. Doctor Franklin didn't say so, but he made so much of an effort not to say so that I am sure he thought it. He told me a change of scene was necessary to get my mind away from—no matter what, and suggested this wretched little forlornity because there is a lot of pine trees growing somewhere. I am not deceived, however. The doctor has done his best, but the result can't be avoided, and is not far off. I don't much care; the sooner it is over, the sooner I shall be at rest. It is about as easy to die in Woodbine as anywhere else.

“October 10th. The old pain, but aggravated by a sharp wind from the northwest. It blew a gale, and the wind whistled through the woods when I went for a walk, as though in derision. All nature, the sky, the clouds, the long sweep of intervale, seemed to say, ‘We’ve got you. You may struggle, but there’s no escape.’ How I hate nature, merciless, relentless, cruel! It is one everlasting *must*—a fist of iron, with no heart behind it. I have had

a miserable day, and shall be glad to go to sleep.

“October 12th. Gooby’s birthday! When he was a mite of a fellow, just learning the use of his tongue, he used to pat his chest with his dimpled hand and cry, ‘Gooby!’ which I interpreted to mean ‘Good boy!’ and by that name he was always called. Ah, how could you leave me? Where are you, dear boy? Anywhere? Nowhere? Who can tell? I suppose every parent is proud of his children, but Gooby was exceptional in some respects. A ten-year-old head on a five-year-old child. That was the trouble. He was sitting on my knee one day, looking intently into the distance, when he turned suddenly and said, ‘Papa, where is heaven, anyway?’ The question struck me with the impact of a bullet, and I staggered, and kept silent. What could I answer? I knew nothing about heaven, and cared less. The present absorbed my attention, and all I asked was that it might run on indefinitely.

He wouldn't be put off, though, and, looking me full in the face, said, 'Papa, how old are you?' 'Why do you ask?' I replied. 'No matter why, papa, just tell me.' 'Well, Gooby, I am thirty-eight.' 'Then,' he cried out, 'you are a great big man, and yet you don't know where heaven is. Aren't you ashamed?' I still kept silent, hoping the boy would change the subject; but he broke out with this odd assertion: 'Papa, you don't know as much as I do. I know where heaven is, because mamma told me all about it.'

"Poor Gooby! he really thought he knew all about it, and it made him happy. Does he know all about it now, or isn't there any heaven to know about? 'To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub.' Ah, if I could be sure of even dreaming, certain I am that in my dreams I should see those dear ones again. But to sleep and not to dream! To sleep on and on, with never a 'good-morning' for any one!

“ These thoughts are too exciting. My pulse is high, while my despair deepens. If I could only, only forget! To remember, and to be helpless and hopeless! I think I know just how the great rebel whom Milton depicts felt when he said, in uncontrollable disgust, ‘ Myself am hell.’

“ October 15th. After what I wrote last night, my conversation with Rev. John Jessig to-day seems rather odd. We met on the street, and I walked home with him. The hour I spent in his library, looking over his books, was rather pleasant, and yet it left a pang in my soul. I can’t see things as he does; would that I could! He has a splendid edition of Horace, and we read some of the Odes together. Jessig is a scholar, and ought not to be buried among a lot of mill hands. Just at the end of our interview—does he know why I am here, or can he see my mental as well as my physical condition?—he took down the

Apology of Socrates and translated this passage, not knowing that he was driving a lance-point into my quivering flesh :

“ ‘ Moreover, we may conclude that there is great hope that death is a blessing. To die is one of two things: either the dead may be annihilated and have no sensation of anything whatever, or, as is said, there is a certain change and passage of the soul from one place to another. If it is a privation of all sensation, as it were a sleep in which the sleeper has no dream, death would be a wonderful gain.

“ ‘ But if, on the other hand, it is a removal from hence to another place, what greater blessing can there be than this, my judges? At what price would you not estimate a conference with Orpheus and Musæus, Hesiod and Homer? I indeed should be willing to die often, if this be true.’

“ I don’t know that I was ever in greater agony in my life, but of course I concealed it

from Jessig. How vividly it brought back those awful days in which my hopes and my life were blasted—wife and child both in the churchyard! The cold perspiration broke out all over me, and for a moment I was faint.

“The theory of reunion I can’t accept, and sleep means eternal separation. That is my quandary. Is God just? I say, a thousand times, no! It is easier for me to dispense with God altogether than to believe in one who could think it either wise or fair to rob me in this ruthless fashion. I simply refuse to be disciplined in that way. A human autocrat who should decree such suffering would drive his subjects to rebellion and endanger his throne. Omnipotence, unfortunately for us, can do as it pleases, but it must not ask for acquiescence in its caprices.

“October 16th. I have just read yesterday’s entry. True, I am in desperate rebellion against what preachers call Providence; but how can I help it? I hear only one word from morning

to night — ‘Gone!’ I see nothing but those two pale faces, and am beside myself. If I could die, or if I could believe! But I can do neither. I am like one consumed with thirst sitting on the bank of the river at which others are drinking their fill, and unable to swallow a drop. For John Jessig’s faith, or for what he professes to believe, I would give a hundred fortunes if I had them. But to stare at heaven and not see it! To look longingly for the dear ones whom fate has hidden from your sight! My weeks are a prolonged nightmare. O religion, if I could once get hold of you! O God, if I could only say ‘Our Father’! But with two graves in evidence, it is impossible. Woe is me! Good-night, old world, good-night.

“October 18th. I spent three hours this morning in the pines. The mercury was well up toward sixty, and with my fall overcoat on I was very comfortable. The wind blew from the south’ard and came across the blithe Cherokee. They call it a river — village pride, I

suppose — but it is only a fair-sized stream. It is a rippling little affair, though, and runs along as merrily as possible. Somehow I thought of it as a line of poetry, and as it tumbled rhythmically over the rocks in its bed I fell to scanning it. I could really make a regular pentameter out of it. Why, I don't know, but these lines of Lowell came to mind as I sat there listening:

‘ And often, from that other world, on this
Some gleams from great souls gone before may shine,
To shed on struggling hearts a clearer bliss,
And clothe the Right with luster more divine.’

“ Perhaps for a full hour I kept repeating these words, and they seemed set to the same tune as the music of the stream. It struck me as an odd coincidence, for it was a mere accident that brought this particular poem to my memory. Did the Cherokee have some message for me? Was it intended by some one who dwells somewhere that I should go to that spot to-day, should hear the river singing, and

should then sing with it those sweet words, which, however, and alas! mean nothing to me?

“I fell into a reverie, a brown study, unleashed my thoughts and let them wander unhampered by my doubts. I almost think I was half happy for a while. There was a soothing influence in the air, and the unbroken stillness was, as it were, sympathetic. Did Lowell believe what he wrote? Is it possible—I don’t ask if it is true, but simply is it possible—that even under the most favorable circumstances ‘some gleams’ from the other world ‘may shine, to shed on struggling hearts’ a bliss, a hope, or, in fact, anything? If it were indeed possible, then it might be also probable; and if it is probable that such an experience may be had by any one, why not by me?

“O Clara, do you know what I am thinking about? Do you realize how I miss you, and how I miss the boy? Was it as hard for you to go as for me to lose you? Can you see me, or hear me? Where are you, darling?

Give me an answer to that question, and I shall be content. It doesn't seem much to ask, and yet how blankly the stars shine on me when I call, and how dumb the shadows are as they creep over the landscape! Not a word. A great wide world, but not one word for me. I don't think I can bear this racking, torturing loneliness much longer.

"October 25th. I had a talk to-day with Hiram Golf, a shoemaker. Jessig took me to his little cottage, and then left us, as he said, 'to have it out.' Golf is either a fool or a philosopher, and I am rather inclined to accept the theory of the former. A queer fellow, but decidedly original. His grammar is simply 'prodigious,' as Dominie Sampson used to say, but he has a way of throwing ideas as though they were cobble-stones.

" 'If I don't keep peggin',' he remarked, as I sat down on a stool, 'I shan't have no dinner; so you'll excuse me if I pound away and listen at the same time.'

“He didn’t say this like one who asks permission to do something, but as though that was his method of procedure and if you didn’t like it it would make no sort of difference. I was half inclined to take my hat and leave, but as I had no place to go to, and was awfully tired of myself, concluded to swallow his peculiarities and stay.

“The conversation ran on in the usual fashion for a while, first on politics, and then on religion, when Golf hammered a peg home, as he blurted out, ‘No God, no nothin’; that’s my way of lookin’ at it.’ This was perhaps in answer to what I had said. I don’t remember. ‘No man can’t budge an inch till he’s solidly fixed on that one fact,’ he remarked again, as he examined an old shoe for repairs.

“‘And if one finds it impossible to become fixed, what then?’ I asked, half indignantly, for his chatter exasperated me. It was intensely personal, though of course he didn’t know that.

“‘Well,’ he replied, ‘in that case he’ll be like

John Babbitt, a city chap, who thought he'd take a cross-cut through the forest yonder, and found out what it means to get lost. We had to borrow a couple of dogs and go and hunt him up. We found him, but he was pretty nigh dead with hunger, and dreadfully scared. Never go through the woods without a guide, and don't go through life without God. Now, those are tough facts, but they're facts.'

"After I left Golf I went down to the bridge that spans the river, and stood there, looking at the sky, at the lazy clouds poised above me like great white birds, and at the farms stretching far away. Those words kept ringing in my ears as the church-bells used to when there was a cry of 'Fire!' They had a harsh sound, and were maddeningly vibrant. 'No God, no nothin'.' A horse and wagon passed me, making the old bridge with its loose boards creak painfully, and the rumbling seemed to take the form of language and repeat the phrase, 'No God, no nothin'.' I looked down into the waters

flowing past, and the western sun threw my shadow, lengthened to the proportions of a giant, on the stream. Was it a wild imagination that make the shadow apparently whisper, 'No God, no nothin' '?

"I didn't admit the proposition when Golf made it; on the contrary, I argued stoutly that modern science was gradually dispensing with the idea of a God. But now that I am alone, I confess that the shoemaker was right. Who knows it better than I do? What are fields and flowers and hills and clouds to me? Would I had never been born, for my life is a quicksand, into which I sink deeper with every struggle to get out. When *they* were with me, I might have believed; but now, with a crushed heart, never. I think I am even defiant.

"Yes, Golf was right, and I'll sleep on it. 'No God, no nothin'.'

"October 28th. Rained hard all day. About three in the afternoon the sun tried to come out, but the clouds were too much for it. I

watched the unequal contest for half an hour with considerable interest, because that is precisely what is happening inside of me. Rainy weather in my soul, sougning winds, and all sorts of teasing, fretting things. Sometimes I think my sun is making a desperate effort to come out, too, but I rather guess it will be thick and drizzly until the end. With everything that I valued gone, why should I be cheerful, or even resigned? Under present circumstances it would be criminal to enjoy anything. I can't forget, I don't want to forget; and yet, until I forget, I must suffer just as I do now.

“In spite of the storm, I called on Jessig. He was getting his sermon ready for Sunday, but kindly allowed me to interrupt him. He is a man with a moral spinal column. When I asked him what he proposed to preach about, he said, ‘The significance and uses of sorrow.’ ‘I suppose,’ I retorted, with some bitterness, ‘you’ll talk about ten minutes and then give it up.’ ‘On the contrary,’ he replied, cheerfully,

‘I find that I can’t get it all into one sermon, and am seriously thinking of making a series. You may yourself have had some experience,’ he added — I thought how Brutus stabbed his friend Cæsar — ‘and perhaps you will give me a warm, encouraging word to say.’ Think of applying to me for words of encouragement! Could I tell any one how to bear grief when I don’t know how to bear my own? Can a vessel that is going to pieces on the rocks tell a neighboring vessel how to sail the seas safely? I don’t know what Jessig thought of my conduct, but I am sure I turned red in the face and stammered in my reply.

“Jessig went to his library, not apparently noticing my embarrassment, and took down a volume, from which he read two or three sentences. ‘You know,’ he said, ‘I believe in two worlds united, not in two worlds separated. Heaven and earth are really one, and the departed and the living are within speaking distance.’

“What a pleasant voice he has! And his clear black eyes have something about them that is magnetic and sympathetic. I like to hear him talk, even when I don’t believe a word he says, as, for example, in the present instance. The story he read was like a bit of poetry, but of course it is a fabrication. There is an island, it seems, somewhere — nobody knows where, though — whose inhabitants live by fishing. So far, so good. I know what fish are, and I know what fishermen are. The shore of this far-away island that nobody has ever located is rocky and dangerous of approach. It happens, therefore, that when the fog settles down the fishermen don’t dare to land, but lay off and on as near to their homes as may be, and wait for clear weather. They can’t see their huts, on account of the mist. Their wives and sweethearts at such times gather on the rocks and sing a verse of some familiar song, then wait and listen. Soon the fishermen take up the second verse and send it

drifting in toward the land. And so these two unseen companies, invisible but nevertheless close to each other, are in constant communication.

“Jessig told me seriously that he believes heaven and earth are not far apart, and that the lost ones are ministering angels.

“I shook my head. ‘It is an agreeable sentiment,’ I said, ‘but it doesn’t appeal to reason.’

“‘To whose reason doesn’t it appeal?’ he said, turning sharply on me.

“‘To mine,’ I answered, determined to hold my own.

“Then he resumed his quiet manner, and remarked, ‘Mr. Van Brunt, you will frankly admit, I think, that there is a very great difference between the assertion “It doesn’t appeal to reason” and the other assertion “It doesn’t appeal to my reason.” It is possible that if it does not appeal to your individual reason, the difficulty may not be in the statement, but in some personal peculiarity of yours.

“‘I am free to say,’ he added, ‘that the incident exquisitely illustrates the truth as I conceive it, and I shall use it in my sermon next Sunday.’

“‘I can’t accept it,’ I said, rather hoarsely, as I took my hat and bade him good-day.

“‘But if it should happen, after all, to be true,’ were his parting words, ‘it would put a new face on affairs, wouldn’t it?’

“So I left him; but somehow those words stick to my memory. Yes, it would indeed put a new face on affairs, but — Pshaw! Let me hold on to my common sense, at any rate.”

CHAPTER III.

A CORNER-STONE LAID.

WE five, the Master, John Jessig, Hiram Golf, Van Brunt, and I, agreed to meet once a week, or as often as convenient, in order to compare notes and chat on such subjects as might present themselves.

No topic was tabooed, not even politics, and on more than one occasion controversial statements flew thick and fast, and wit and sarcasm and repartee filled the air with good-natured electric sparks.

But this chronicle will contain no record of secular subjects. My purpose is to follow the footprints of Van Brunt as he emerged from the shadow and arrived at last at the foot of the Cross. It was a long and painful journey, but he pushed bravely on, and reached the vantage-

ground from which the heavens are clearly visible.

We called it The Fireside Club. There was something hospitable and homelike in the name, and when the Master suggested it we thought it an inspiration.

"A fireside," said Hiram, as he lifted a log in place with the iron tongs and sent a tornado of sparks up the chimney, "a fireside kind of invites you to talk free. I couldn't talk no other way if I tried, so it suits me wonderful."

"And a bright blaze," added Jessig, who moved his chair a little farther back from the fire, "is suggestive of cheerfulness, which is one of the most important elements of religion."

"It ought to be," broke in Hiram, "but unfortunately it gen'rally isn't. When I size up most of the religion in the world, it reminds me of a box of lemons; and lemon religion is a direct insult to the Lord. Folks is positively afraid of the love of God, and want as little to do with it as possible. They've got a notion

—though where they picked it up I don't know—but they've got a notion that it's well enough for God to love them, but if they return His love they'll have a pretty stupid time in this life, and do nothin' but play on a harp in the next one. I don't want to hurt nobody's feelin's, and the parson will correct me if I'm wrong; but in my jedgment the religion that don't appeal to a man's common sense and make him say, 'There ain't no two ways about it; I've got to have it, no matter what it costs,' isn't worth preachin' about."

Van Brunt sat gazing at the fire, but said nothing. I think he felt as I imagine a discord in music feels. There was an air of despondency about him that was very pathetic, and half defiant. He was pale, but now and again, as at Hiram's blunt remarks, his face suddenly flushed. Perhaps you know what I mean when I say we got the impression from his bearing that he "wanted to, but couldn't." There was a hair in the watch, and the hands did not move.

We respected his moody reticence, and during the first hour talked as though he were not present. But before the evening was over he joined the discussion, and it was evident from his remarks that he was both traveled and cultured.

The Master struck the keynote by saying, "Since God desires every man to be saved, we have a right to expect that the plan of salvation will be simple enough for the humblest creature to understand. In God's dealings with the human race there is no mystery. He has not revealed Himself to a few scholars only, but to the whole world. If a man has any mind at all, he has only to read the New Testament to find out what God requires."

"That is the same as sayin'," remarked Hiram, "that if the Lord wants me to get to heaven, and is goin' to advise me which road to take, what hills I've got to climb, and what valleys to trudge through, He won't tell me to go to Parson Jessig or Deacon Milbank, 'cos

they've been to college and I haven't, but'll talk to me in plain shoemaker language."

"The sole object of religion, as Christ taught it," resumed the Master, "is to make us worthy to be saved, or, in other words, to produce a noble life. If it fails in that, it fails in everything."

"You object to a creed, then?" asked Jesus.

"Not at all," was the prompt answer. "I would have a creed, but I would keep it in its place. Creeds are not necessary to salvation, but Christ is. The one is made by man, and must be changed as research discovers new facts; the other was sent by God, and is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. What the scholars of the time say may be true or not; what Christ says is always true. I have known men to linger so long in finding out whether this or that theory of God's will was correct, that they had no time to practice the ordinary virtues."

Hiram's eyes were blazing. He handled his crutch nervously, moved in his chair restlessly, and then broke out with:

“Thank God for every one of them words! When you get down to the core of things, I reckon you'll come to the conclusion that doin' is a good deal better'n believin', ef you can't do both; and the best way is to begin with the doin' and let the believin' catch up with you if it can. The gospel of gettin' to heaven by means of believin' was writ for those sly old sinners who want to shirk duty, and expect to slip through the Golden Gate by carryin' their creed as an entrance ticket. But the Lord ain't easy to cheat. If you 'do' the law, it ain't hard to 'believe' it. It's in the natur' of things, and you can't help it. But if you only 'believe' the law, and don't do it, you're goin' to have a hard time explainin' matters when you get up yonder.”

“This is all so new to me,” said Van Brunt, in rather a startled tone, “that you must excuse

me if I express some surprise. Do you really mean to tell me that the essence of the whole thing is contained in the desire to be useful to your kind, in being — ”

“ Pure in heart? ” suggested Jessig.

“ Bearing yourself like a prince of the household of God? ” added the Master.

“ But faith — ” began Van Brunt.

“ Faith in God as your Father? ” asked Jessig.

“ Faith in Christ as your Guide and Teacher? ” asked the Master.

“ Faith in your fellow-man when he needs just the help which you can give? ” I asked.

“ No, no, not quite that, ” answered Van Brunt, who must have felt that he was being pelted with questions. “ But faith in the long list of doctrines which we were told in our boyhood are necessary for acceptance with God. ”

“ Just supposin’ a case, ” broke in Hiram. “ When I come to stand before the Judgment

Bar, would it be common sense for me to say, 'Lord, I'm dependin' largely on what I believed for admittance, and I hope You won't look too closely into my doin's'? There ain't no use tryin' to deceive Him, so I've got to put the thing straight. Suppose I say, 'I've accepted the whole creed just as the parsons down there told me to. It made a pretty full meal, and I had some trouble with dyspepsy. Parts of it was tasty and wholesome, but other parts had to be cut dreadful fine before I could get 'em down. Don't be hard on me, for though I'm a little weak in the matter of livin', and didn't allers trade on the square, there ain't a trace of heresy about me anywhere.' If I did that, I reckon the Lord would have a frown on His face, and answer me, 'Hiram, I thought I gave you a little common sense, but I must 'a' forgot to, or else you've dropped it on the road. Perhaps you'd better go back and pick it up, for you're too good a man to throw away; and yet there ain't no place 'round here for a

soul that could make such stupid remarks as you've been doin'."

"Very well, then," began Van Brunt, "but what —"

"Hold on a minnit," Hiram cried, "and I'll tell the other side. I wouldn't risk it to go to heaven with nothin' but my belief to vouch for me, or with my belief and an ordinary sort of life; but I wouldn't feel no fear at all if I could say to the Lord, 'Dear Lord, You didn't give me any special amount of brains, so You mustn't expect me to know much about theology; but You did give me a pretty good sort of heart, and it has prompted me to do some little work for Your children. I'd like to introduce in evidence the case of Jim Burchard, who lived on the cross-road just north of the Cherokee. When I found him he was a reg'lar attendant on a rumshop, and he abused his fam'ly. I tugged away at him—that is, Parson Jessig and me—and after a while he come 'round all right, and died a sober and prayin'

citizen. There he is over yonder, among the host of the redeemed, singin' "Hallelujah!" with all his might.' Well, now, I reckon the Lord wouldn't send me back to hunt 'round for my common sense if I could tell Him that, and prove it."

"Am I to believe what Hiram says?" asked Van Brunt, who was almost excited. "Is that genuine religion? Is that all there is in it?"

"Yes," answered the Master, "that is genuine religion, because it is following the example set by the Saviour. But it is not all there is in it, for it is entirely legitimate to speculate, if you are properly equipped for that task. It is intensely interesting to read the conclusions which the great theologians have reached, and their investigations are of advantage to the Church, but these matters are not essential to your acceptance with God. The man who simply follows the Sermon on the Mount will, after a while find that he is on the threshold of heaven."

"I think," Van Brunt went on, "I think I am being positively denuded of all my inherited notions on this subject. This is new to me, and I should like to ask where I am to begin."

"If one begins with a personal and paternal God," answered the Master, "he begins well; if he has doubts on that point, he ends before he begins."

"Well, then," said Van Brunt, "I have at least made a good start. But the next step?"

"The next step is equally important," responded the Master. "You must not only believe in this personal God with your intellect, but with your heart; that is to say, you must enter into close relations with Him, friendly and confidential relations. You must be conscious that He is near at hand, and interested in all the details of your life."

"Ah," said Van Brunt, with a sigh, "that is a very different and a much more difficult matter. Alluring, indeed, but is it possible?"

“A God,” continued the Master, “who controls the universe by laws made eons ago, and who has no present interest in what He has made, is a vague and rather dreadful Being, whom we may address in a formal and perfunctory way; but a God who is so intimately related to His world that not a sparrow falls to the ground without His notice, and who asks us to work with Him, that we and He may accomplish the divine purpose—that is a conception which makes us heroic.”

“You are wadin’ in rather deep water,” broke in Hiram, fixing his eyes on the logs in the fireplace; “but what a wonderful and gracious world this would be if everybody was that way of thinkin’! God *and* me! God *in* me! God sayin’ to me, ‘Hiram, I’m omnipotent, you know, and I’m anxious to give you all you can hold. Keep growin’, Hiram, and then you can hold more, and shall have more.’ ”

“To my mind,” remarked Van Brunt, “there is something presumptuous in all this. I am

not sure that I could reverence a God who would enter into such relations with a poor, miserable creature like myself. I was brought up on monarchical ideas of theology. I was taught in my boyhood that God is jealous, as we understand the word, and half anxious to punish me for something. As that conception made no appeal to me, I grew indifferent, and have remained so. What you say has a very strange sound. Were our fathers wrong? Are they no longer to be heeded? I confess that the possibility of spiritual nearness which you hold out is alluring, but I fear you are going too far, and have no sufficient warrant for so radical a position."

Jessig took a New Testament from the table, and, without saying a word, laid it on the Master's lap.

"Thank you," said the gray-haired saint. Then, taking the book and opening it, he continued:

"There is but one Teacher who is the final

appeal in a case like this. Forget, if you can, all that you have been taught, and listen to His words. They are radiant and uplifting, deep as the sea, and high as heaven, and yet so plain that no one need misunderstand them."

He turned to the seventeenth chapter of John, and added:

"This is the language of Christ, uttered in the supremest moment of His earthly career:

"'That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us.'"

Hiram moved restlessly, and his eyes gleamed. His lips trembled with excitement, but there was a spell on the little company, and none of us dared to speak. The Master was opening the door of a palace and assuring us of a cordial welcome. He was showing us that the Bible has a side at which we seldom look. It is not simply the record of a revelation made centuries ago, and half congealed by time, but a new, fresh, and glorious revelation

of hidden possibilities in ourselves. We almost held our breath as he went on :

“ These words either mean what they seem to mean, or they mean nothing. They contain no figure of speech ; they present a fact. There can be no cavil as to the translation, for the original is not difficult to read. Being false, our edifice falls into ruins, and we are left to nurse a mere guess. Being true, it requires but to act on them and straightway the heavens are opened, and human life is transfigured.

“ What a marvelous possibility is held out to us ! God, Christ, ourselves, all one. That is the ideal for the realization of which the Saviour prayed. What dignity the thought adds to human nature ! For the first time it becomes plain to us that ‘ God created man in His own image.’ Is that, too, a figure of speech ? Is the Bible nothing more than a mass of Oriental hyperbole ? If we were originally made in the image of God, and if, after disfiguring

that image beyond recognition by ages of sinfulness, the Saviour could pray that we and He and God might come to be one at last, what a vista of great deeds, glorious aspirations, and high ambitions breaks upon our startled vision! It is hard to grasp such royalty of thought, such grandeur of destiny; but when grasped, how small and petty seem the cares and anxieties of this present time. The mind that revolves about such a central sun grows more brilliant as it speeds along its orbit, and scatters light in all the dark regions of space."

Hiram could contain himself no longer.

"I can't say," he cried, "that I am quite up to catchin' the whole meanin' of your talk, but I'm like my boy John. When he was a youngster, he got sight of a brass band that was playin' in the village. He was so far off he couldn't hear it all, but he got hold of two or three notes, and was sartin that it was 'Hail Columbia,' and began to shout 'Hurrah!' I've heard enough of this to know that it must

be the kind of doctrine I've hammered out for myself while peggin' at my bench, and I want to shout 'Glory!'

It was impossible to repress a smile, but Hiram was in serious and deadly earnest. Even Van Brunt unbent for a moment, and his lips twitched. But the shoemaker had not finished. He went on:

"I reckon it's about like my Marthy on bakin' day. There's the dough on the board, but 'tain't no good while it's only dough. There is somethin' wantin' to make it into bread, and that is, good yeast. Marthy takes the yeast, sprinkles it over the dough, and then kneads it in. And she keeps sprinklin' and kneadin' until yeast and dough are no more two, but one. Now, it may not be the yeast that makes the dough into bread, but it's sartin that no dough will make bread fit to eat unless there's risin' in it.

"It's somehow that way with a man. He isn't good for much until God's Spirit is all

through him, kneaded into him. After that, he'll make up into wholesome bread."

It was a very homely but an entirely unique illustration, and quite characteristic of the shoemaker.

"Admitting that the man of no faith is the man of no happiness," said Van Brunt, "how is one to get rid of these uninvited doubts? What mental purgative shall he take to cleanse his blood of such impurities? A thoughtful man hesitates to convert religion into a game of blindman's-buff. I must be convinced, and that implies an intellectual process, a premise which is undeniable, and a conclusion that is logically inevitable."

"I quite appreciate the objections you urge," replied the Master, in something like a whisper. "I have suffered enough from such harassments to know how wearying they are. But may I suggest that while the intellect very naturally and easily reaches the conclusion that there must be such a being as God, still when it insists on

knowing who and what He is, and how He does what is done, it becomes hopelessly befogged. You can't take the measure of God by triangulation. The surveyor's chain is also useless for the purpose. He can't be reduced to an algebraic proposition and demonstrated. If there be no other methods of discovery, we may as well cease our efforts at once. An ant might as well try to comprehend a giant as anything finite to comprehend the Infinite. God slips away into hiding when we seek for His specific gravity. You can't weigh a mountain with the apothecary's scales, in which scruples and grains are used. Science is rather arrogant in its claims; it says to God, 'Come here, and let us see what You are like; do something, and let us see how You do it; we will say a prayer by way of experiment, and You will be kind enough to answer it in such way that we can see how the machinery operates.' When such efforts are followed by failure, when the Almighty disdains to exhibit

Himself, the man of science looks at the audience and says, 'There is no God; it's all a mistake.'

"The ant says to the giant, 'Come down into my ant-hill and let me hear you talk, and see how you do your work.' If the giant replies, 'I can't make myself as small as you are, any more than you can make yourself as large as I am,' the scientific ant turns to his fellows and says, 'There is no giant; you are all mistaken.'"

"I confess," retorted Van Brunt, with flashing eyes and flushed cheeks, "to being somewhat confused. I am in a labyrinth, and feel around in the darkness for a clew. It has seemed to me that I ought not to believe what I can't understand, and ought not to trust myself to do anything that I can't see clearly."

"And yet," broke in Hiram, turning squarely about and facing Van Brunt, "you do that every day of your life."

"I think not," answered Van Brunt.

“Well, let me tell you what happened to me once, and then you’ll get hold of my meanin’. Two year ago last August I was goin’ across Lake Erie in a steamboat. We hadn’t been out more’n two hours afore a thick mist settled down on us. I couldn’t see the for’ard part of the vessel. Thinks I, ‘This is a bad mess, and I don’t see why we shan’t run ashore somewhere.’ I thought of Marthy, and the boy out in Montana, and felt pretty blue. But the steamer run along at full speed as though ’twas broad daylight. ‘That’s rather reckless,’ says I to myself, and I went on the upper deck to have a talk with the capt’n, whom I knew. He married one of my old schoolmates, and we’d sorter kep’ up an acquaintance.

“‘Ain’t you goin’ at full speed?’ said I.

“‘Sartin, Hiram,’ he answered. ‘This boat is bound to get there on time.’

“‘’Tain’t dangerous nor nothin’?’ I asked.

“‘We don’t care for no fog,’ he replied, ‘long’s the compass holds out. We’re steerin’

by that, and ain't likely to make no mistakes.'

"Then he showed me that little needle, that seemed to be floatin' on water, and wrigglin' from side to side slowly, as though it knew its business. He said, 'Hiram, that allers p'int's one way if you let it alone and don't put no iron near it.'

"Of course I wasn't ignorant of what a compass is and what it's for; but the question that Mr. Van Brunt has just put was lyin' in my mind at that moment. For that matter, I've wrestled with doubts myself, and they give me a pretty hot time of it, too, I can tell you. That's what put me to inquire. So when Capt'n Bebee said the compass allers p'inted one way, I asked:

" 'What makes it, capt'n?'

" 'I don't know,' says he.

" 'Don't nobody know?' says I.

" 'I guess not,' says he. 'Never heard of anybody that did.'

“ ‘Not even the great scholars of the world?’ says I.

“ ‘Never knew of one that could tell the why or the wherefore,’ says he.

“ ‘And you trust your life to somethin’ you don’t know nothin’ about?’ says I.

“ ‘Every time,’ says he.

“ ‘How do you dare, Capt’n Bebee?’ says I, thinkin’ to draw him out.

“ ‘Becos,’ says he, ‘the needle has been tried a good many hundred year now, and it continually p’int’s straight to the nor’ard. All the money that’s invested in all the ships that floats, and all the money put into val’able cargoes, depends on that bit of steel’s tellin’ the truth, and up to now it hain’t told no lie. You can depend on it, sure, and yet nobody knows why it does just as it does.’ ”

Van Brunt sank back in his chair, and was silent. I think he was somewhat mortified that his query should have been answered by the shoemaker rather than by another of

the company, but he was too well bred to show it.

As we shook hands with one another at the close of the meeting, we all felt, I think, that The Fireside Club gave promise of great helpfulness.

CHAPTER IV.

A DREAM AND A DISCOVERY.

THE next extract from Van Brunt's diary has a peculiar interest, because he had discovered the secret of his attitude toward religion. I can't quite say, as I read it, that the darkest hour is giving way to dawn, but the gloomy shadows in the east are beginning to lighten and to show the possibility of sunrise. It is still very thick weather with him, and yet it is plain that if he persists in groping after the light, his efforts will some time be successful.

He is at any rate in a calmer state of mind, and the desperation of other days is slowly giving way to something better. When we first knew him he seemed like a poor shipwrecked sailor who is hopelessly battling with

the waves, and wondering if it is not better to cease his struggles and go down and have done with it. But at the time when he wrote the pages from which I shall quote, he was like that same sailor, who has found a broken spar and determined to make one last effort to reach the land.

Poor fellow! Many of us have been in a like predicament, and know how to pity him. There are other souls in this wide world wrestling with cruel doubts, and half conscious that if some one would only tear the clouds away, they could see the face of a kindly Providence. They are where Van Brunt was on the 5th of November, when his outlook was dismal indeed; and mayhap they will take the road which led him to the hilltop of the following March, when he said with Simon, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."

"November 5th. There have been two meetings of The Fireside Club, and I was pres-

ent at both of them. I felt like an alien and a stranger, for the language of faith is an unknown tongue to me as yet, and I am half inclined to make some excuse when the time for the next meeting arrives. Jessig and Hiram talk as though only a thin partition separates this life from the next, and they are on such familiar terms with God that my old-fashioned Puritan orthodoxy--that is, what little there is left of it--is shocked. They say 'Our Father' as though He were really a father, and not the august Being who is to punish a sinful world.

"Are they in earnest? Do they deceive themselves? Are they hypocrites? Excuse the last word, but somehow it would drop from my pencil. Jessig said the other day that God pities the man who bears a great burden. Pities! Does He pity *me*? Oh, no! The catechism taught me that I am a worm of the dust, doomed to the pit for a crime which I didn't commit, but the guilt of which I inherited from all the generations back to Adam. If that is

so, what nonsense to tell me that He pities me as I struggle with these awful griefs! Why should He pity me? I don't believe it.

“ November 8th. Went with Jessig to see the family of a mill hand. The man has been improvident, probably ; at any rate, he drank too much bad liquor. Still, he was sick, and the doctor quietly informed us that the end was not far off. I don't much like that sort of business, but I couldn't leave Jessig to go alone. My city friends would have enjoyed it if they could have seen me carrying a basket of potatoes on one arm and about ten pounds of flour on the other. But what was a fellow to do? You can't get a coach-and-six to make such calls with, and there isn't an express in the village. I puffed under the load in the most ludicrous way ; but when Mrs. Boggs saw the provisions — well, I was afraid, for a few moments, that she would throw her arms about my neck and kiss me. The poor creature burst into a flood of tears, and muttered something about gener-

osity and gratitude, and a lot of other stuff, but I don't recall what it was.

“Those children—there are four—demolished some apples I took them as an extra; and as for the huge cake of gingerbread—you've seen Hermann slip things out of sight by sleight-of-hand, and the gingerbread disappeared in the same mysterious way. I'm not much of a philanthropist, but the Boggses shan't suffer for want of something to eat while I am in Woodbine. The second boy, Jim, was about the age of Gooby, and in one or two of his little ways reminded me of him.

“Ah me! The old feeling comes surging back again. Why, why, why was it so? My only boy! And snatched out of my very arms! I must close, or I shan't sleep for bitterness.

“November 10th. I had to-day a very strange experience, and I'm going to put it down in detail. Perhaps it means—but no, I am not to be influenced by sentiment. The Master

says that we ought to be governed in all things by common sense, and I propose to exercise mine.

“I was sitting in my parlor, looking out of the window. A terrific storm was drenching the valleys, and the hills were obscured by mists, like great white veils hanging from the sky. It rained at times as though another flood were upon us, and of course I couldn't stir out-of-doors. My pain somehow increased, and altogether I had a wretched time of it. The inexorable is near at hand, I suppose, and this physical discomfort is simply a warning to be ready. If death would only bring me to my dear ones, how I would welcome it! Life as life seems worthless. The mere act of living is not pleasurable. It is loving that makes living desirable.

“I wasn't in my usual mood, but was thinking of the Master, and Jessig, and the shoemaker, Golf. Three happier men I never knew. What makes them happy? Jessig is just

spending himself for these poor people. He had a call to a city church, with a large salary, and refused it. What is he made of? The Master has a very slender income, so I am told—barely enough to pay his debts and cover his funeral expenses. If he were to die he could square himself with the world, and no more. As for Hiram, he pegs at shoes ten hours a day, and is the most cheery and contented man in the village. I said to him last week, ‘Hiram, you are getting old,’ and he replied, ‘Yes, and I’m all broken up with rheumatis; but what of it? ’Tisn’t long before I shall be young. When I get rid of this sixty-eight-year body, the Lord will make me a present of a new one, and I’m kinder lookin’ for’ard to it.’

“While I sat looking at the falling rain, I seemed to step out of myself, and to see things as they see them—that is to say, I occupied, for the time being, their standpoint. Was it a beautiful dream? How marvelously happy I was! Such a peacefulness pervaded me as I

never dreamed of. The sun on a summer sea is the only thing I could think of. I was like one who is being led by the great Shepherd of His sheep; like one whose soul is filled with calm, serene faith, on which no cloud ever throws its shadow. In a word, God was in very reality *my* God—not visible, because the glory between Him and me would have blinded my eyes, had I looked; but within reach of my hand, and within reach of my cry. I was surrounded by the murmuring of many voices, like muffled music heard at a distance; and as I listened, in rapt delight, I was almost certain that I could detect those of my dear Clara and my little Gooby. How soft and balmy the air was! And everything was filled with a radiance which seemed so natural that I ceased to be surprised at it.

“‘This,’ my heart cried in ecstasy, ‘this is the “house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens”! This is the “place” of which the dear Lord spoke, and which He said He was

going to prepare for those who love Him.' The rain was apparently gone, or I was unconscious of it. The mellow sunlight poured over hill and valley, until the entire landscape presented a most entrancing picture. It stretched far, far away, while above it arched the sapphire sky, as gently as a mother bends over her sleeping child.

"Strangely enough, my bereavement, my infinite loss, the memory of my stricken life and my broken home, were present with me. That dread affliction was still there. But oh, how different! It was not a dull, leaden load of hopeless misery, which crushed me to the earth, but by some transfiguring influence it made me yearn for the other world where my dear ones rest. Angels—were they the 'unseen beings who walk the earth both when we wake and when we sleep,' as Milton sings?—gathered about me in sympathy, helped to bear my sorrow, whispered to me to be of good cheer, pointed to the glorious heavens, and cried,

‘Whom He loveth He chasteneth. Come to the Saviour, dear brother, and bring your heavy cross into His presence.’ I gazed, I yearned, I lifted my hands, and some one among the angels took them in his.

“All at once it came to my mind that this sense of nearness to heaven, this filial trust in a Father’s love, is what the Master means when he talks so calmly of suffering, what John Jessig referred to in his sermon last Sunday when he told us that no harm can come to one who loves the Lord, and what Golf, the shoemaker, enjoys while he hammers at his lapstone and sings the while.

“‘Is it possible that one can feel all the time as I feel now?’ I cried. ‘Is this an hallucination caused by nervous exhaustion, or is it what the real Christian may have both summer and winter?’ I thought my heart would break by excess of happiness. ‘If my Clara is there,’ I said, ‘if my boy is there, I will bear the separation as best I can, in the hope that some

time I will join them. Thy will, O God, be done.'

"Then all at once, like the breaking of a magic spell, it was gone, and there I sat looking out of the window at the pouring rain, my heart once more leaden, and my hopes all dead. But I thought and thought of what I had seen, wondered what had happened to produce such an effect, sighed, moaned, and—pardon the confession—even wept. It was more than I could bear, and I went to my bed, bidding the rainy, cold, and cheerless world good-night.

"November 11th. I have just read my entry of yesterday, and don't know how to account for what happened. If some one had hypnotized me! But who could have done that? Besides, I was alone; and then, again, I am not at all what is called a sensitive, and not subject to that kind of influence.

"How I would like to tell the whole story to the Master—yes, or to young Jessig, who is one of the noblest fellows I ever met. Perhaps they

have heard of a like occurrence, for of course I am not the only one who has had this singular experience. By what law of psychology was I thrown into that abnormal state of mind? Alas, that it *is* abnormal! If it were only a natural state of mind, or one which I might attain by struggle or sacrifice, or at any cost, I would begin the task at once. No, I dare not tell any one. They would either laugh at me or else conclude that it indicated some stage of my malady.

“I sat two hours to-day in my room, with the sun pouring through the window, thinking it all over; and the more I thought of it, the less able I was to solve the puzzle. If I could be sure that I was asleep, then I might place it in the list of dreams, and that would end it. But, so far as I know—and I can see no reason why I should be deceived—I was awake, quiet, or rather quiescent, but just as truly awake as I am at this moment. It is a queer world!

“November 15th. I had a long talk with

the Master to-day, and one assertion which he made struck me with such benumbing force that it knocked all remembrance of what else he said out of my mind. Literally, I can recall not another word or expression, though we must have chatted for a full hour.

“It is very odd, but perhaps he gave me the key to my mental attitude without knowing it. He builded better than he knew. Or did he know what he was doing, and was his assertion a probe, a surgeon’s probe, with which he hunted for the fatal bullet that is lodged somewhere in my soul? He said, ‘It is possible for pious parents to do a great injury to their children. A man may mean to do what is for the best, and really do what is for the worst. If the terrors of the Lord are brought vividly before the young imagination, the boy may get so terrible an idea of religion that he never recovers from it. Children should be led gently to right thinking, for harsh measures twist the mind out of its proper shape.’

“Great heavens! What a revelation those words were to me! Was the Master aware that he was criticising my own father, and bringing against him the grave charge of ruining his son by the very means he used to save him? It never occurred to me before, but can it be that my present unbelief is a spiritual reaction from the severe training of my boyhood days? Can it be that, after all, my infidelity is not based on logic, on scientific research, as I have always thought, but is the effect of early teaching on a delicate and nervous nature? Why didn't I think of this long ago?

“Oh, my pride of intellect! I imagined I had solved the great puzzle and discovered that Providence is only another name for natural law, that God is a persistent myth, that heaven is a pleasant fable. No one was ever more strongly intrenched than I, and though I have envied Clara her simple faith, and wouldn't have disabused her mind for a thousand worlds, since she was so happy in her belief, I have been

convinced clear through that the promises of Christianity were counterfeit notes which passed among the ignorant for good money. Now I am taught by experience that there *may* be — that is about as far as I dare trust myself — there may be ‘more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy.’

“What if I have been wrong all these years! What if the Master is right, after all! What if the chain of logic I have forged has a broken or imperfect link, *and there is a heaven!* My God! My God! It makes my blood tingle. But not too fast, Peter Van Brunt. Tread very carefully, my dear fellow, and don’t allow yourself to follow any *ignis fatuus*, even if it is peculiarly enticing.

“I have been an idiot, have I? I thought I was using my brains, when I was merely driven by my prejudices. Is that it? Oh no, it can’t be! I had better, even at this stage of the game, with death not far away, face the awful

truth, than nurse a lie, however delightful it may be.

“Still, the Master was right in his general statement. I had a frightfully religious boyhood, and it makes me shudder, even now, to think of it. My father was the best man that ever lived. I think of him with reverent admiration, and cherish his memory with many tears. He was an old-fashioned orthodox deacon, in the days when orthodoxy meant something. His father was also a deacon, and his grandfather the same. There were no diluting compromises in the orthodoxy of any of them; it was pure Calvinism. Father lived right up to his belief, was descended in a direct line from the Puritans, and kept his inherited faith intact.

“He brought me up with a birch-rod and a catechism. Nowadays, boys learn so many verses of Scripture and get a prize. If I didn’t learn my Scripture lesson I got a thrashing. My earliest ideas of the Bible are closely asso-

ciated with a certain rawhide, which I shall probably never forget. I dreaded the rawhide, and I hated the Bible. The dear man wanted to be able to say at the Judgment that if I wasn't fit for heaven he couldn't be blamed for it, because he had never spared the rod when there was a chance to use it.

"On Sunday I was up at five in the morning, and worked doing farm chores until breakfast-time. Then I went to the ten-o'clock meeting, and sat in a straight-backed pew until my neck got a crick in it. After the morning service came an intermission of an hour, then Sunday-school, then the afternoon sermon, and in the evening a tedious and doleful prayer-meeting.

"The minister hadn't a shred or tatter of good-nature in him—none, at least, that was ever visible to us boys. He was solemn and severe, with cavernous eyes, and a harsh, grating voice. He preached mostly on the terrors of the Lord, and pictured the pit in such vivid phrases that I have many a time pulled the bed-

clothes up over my head at night and cried myself to sleep. He told us that the chances were all against us, that it is an awful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God, and, to my excited imagination, he seemed to be glad of it. I looked upon him as the vicegerent of the Almighty, never dreamed of doubting any assertion he was pleased to make, and thought of God as a great big orthodox minister shaking His thunderbolts over the human race.

“One Sunday I was on a visit to my uncle, who was not a deacon, and was rather liberal. He cheerily told me in the afternoon to put on my overalls and go to the pasture for the cows. Overalls on Sunday! It looked like sacrilege. I was frightened. In my father's house my week-day clothes were laid aside on Saturday night, and on Sunday I had a different suit, and did all necessary work in it. While driving the cows to the barn it came across me—I was not more than nine years old—that if God saw me with those overalls on He would be terribly

mad, and probably send me to hell at once. I hurried with all my might, and had no peace until I reached the barn and slipped those overalls off. Even then, I slunk around with a cowardly fear that I should get my punishment before morning.

“Of course, when I grew to man’s estate I turned my back squarely on church, minister, and religion. According to the Master, that course lay in the line of natural revenge for what I considered an injury done. I have never thought of it in that way, and it is barely possible that the severity of my early training had something to do with my later indifference.

“But can it be true that this is the root of my present difficulty? I must talk with Jessig about the matter.

“Well, I can only say this much, that if I could believe in the Master’s God rather than in the God my old pastor used to tell us of, I should become almost light-hearted. At thirty-nine, however, one doesn’t easily change.”

CHAPTER V.

AN UNBROKEN LINE.

IT was John Jessig's turn to introduce the next topic for discussion. He was a hard and conscientious student, and had accumulated a library that represented the best thought of the past and the latest research of science and scholarship. "These," he said to me one day, pointing to his books, "keep me stimulated. They are my closest companions, and I am never lonely. After a day's work in the parish it is very restful to read a paragraph here and there from authors who are shaping the opinions of the world."

"But," I replied, "aren't you throwing yourself away among a people who certainly can't follow you? You ought to be in some great

metropolitan pulpit, where your words would have weight."

"It is not quite modest in me to say so," he answered, with a quiet smile, "but I used to think that myself. I recently received a call to an important church"—he couldn't entirely repress his sense of pride while making the declaration—"but after a long talk with Hiram Golf one day, I concluded to remain here. He told me what I ought to have known before, that if a man has no other ambition than to do God's work and to be of service to his fellows, there is as much to be done here as in the great pulpit of a great city."

"Yes, I know all that," I retorted, "but these poor folk could get on very well under a preacher with five talents instead of ten. You have a duty to yourself."

"No, I have only my duty to the Lord," he answered, quickly. "Besides, you are mistaken in supposing that poor people can't reason as well as rich people. I have found that the

most rugged thinkers belong to the class of wage-earners. They think crudely sometimes, but they have a desperate amount of solid judgment, and are not easily deceived by superficial or false reasoning."

"I am not prepared for that statement," I remarked, my tones full of doubt.

"Still, it is the fact. I am firmly convinced of it. My people can tell the difference between a good and a bad sermon as surely as any metropolitan congregation. These men have been and still are in the struggle for existence. It is a hard fight for them from the time they enter the mill to the day when they are carried to the churchyard. Theories of religion don't count for much with them, are neither edifying nor interesting; but a careful recital of the main facts of Providence, an explanation of the way in which their rough path may be smoothed, or of the probable reason why God saw fit to put them where they are and give them their heavy tasks, and what spiritual ben-

efits can be derived from them — these topics will arouse their attention and enlist their sympathy.

“ They have frequently discussed such matters with me when I have met them on the street, and I assure you that if you can hold your own with a hard-fisted and hard-headed workingman who has been in the fight for twenty years, it is because you are a man of mettle. The amount of real thinking which is being done by the common people of America is far beyond what we credit them with.”

“ And do you prepare your sermons,” I said, “ with great — ”

“ Yes,” he broke in, “ with the greatest care. I preach my very best, and my best is none too good for them.

“ For example,” he continued, “ I gave a whole course of lectures last winter on the historic development of religion. My purpose was to show that among the most barbaric races belief in God, crude, of course, and a knowledge

of right and wrong, not by our standard, but by a standard of their own, prevailed in those almost prehistoric days when men first used flint hatchets, and before copper and iron were made into tools. Look on this shelf, and see the books I consulted for that purpose. Here is Lang's 'Queensland,' and Moffat's 'South Africa,' and Ellis's 'Madagascar,' and Mouat's 'Andaman Islanders,' and Lubbock's 'Origin of Civilization,' and Baker's 'Races of the Nile Basin,' and some score more, in French, German, and English."

"And these mill men and women were interested?" I asked, in astonishment.

"More than that," he replied. "They came at last in such numbers that I had to request them to bring stools and chairs with them. They filled the aisles, and within a month we had a genuine rational revival."

"Marvelous!" I exclaimed.

"Not at all," he answered. "I was simply proving to them that religion is not a graft on

the tree, but is rooted in human nature; that men have always had some kind of religion, and always will have, because they can't possibly get on without it. And the man who works for a living is as eager to know about such things as the man of leisure; more so, perhaps. I never enjoyed myself so much in my life as I did at that time, and I never worked harder to get down to bottom principles."

"Why not take that subject for discussion at The Fireside Club?" I suggested.

"That is my intention," was the reply.

And he did.

He had at least a dozen books piled on his study table, and during the evening verified his most startling statements by extracts from nearly all of them.

"My proposition," he began, "is that in the remotest times of which history furnishes us a record men were quite as religious as they are now. There never has been an hour since the

dawn of creation when some conception of a controlling Power was not prevalent among all races."

I think Van Brunt inwardly contested this assertion, for he opened his eyes wide, and remarked:

"Is that the general testimony of travelers among savage tribes?"

"No," was the reply. "Some of them, as Don Felix de Azora for example, stoutly maintained that many of the native South Africans have no religious notions whatever."

"Are you not hasty, then, in your conclusion?" was the quick query.

"I notice, however," continued Jessig, "that in the course of his observations he remarked that the Payaguas bury a certain amount of clothing and a bow and arrow with their dead, which can only be explained on the ground of belief that after death they went somewhere where these things would be useful.

"A careful study of the subject will, I think,

convince any candid thinker that cultured and civilized man has simply developed what was intuitive on the part of the uncultured and barbaric races.

“They lived in huts, and we in palaces. They had crude notions, but we have a formulated and well-reasoned belief. That is the chief difference between them and ourselves. If I may not say that there has never been an age nor a race where God, under some symbol or other, has not been acknowledged, I can assert without fear of denial that, so far as our research extends, no such age and no such race have been found. Atheism is not indigenous to the soil. It is simply a voracious parasite, which has lived on the general faith of the world.

“We don’t believe much more than the race has always believed, but we know why we believe, and our remote ancestors did not.”

“Do you mean, then,” interrupted the Master, “that primitive man accepted the fact that he was dual, with a soul as well as a body?”

“The belief in immortality,” said Jessig, “is coeval with the race. No matter how savage a given tribe may be, or how murderous their vocation, its funeral rites indicate unshaken faith that death has not destroyed their comrade. In other words, the wildest tribe in Central Africa accepted the truth which Tennyson sang in the lines,

“ ‘Eternal form shall still divide
The eternal soul from all beside;
And I shall know him when we meet.’ ”

“What, then, has progress accomplished?” asked Van Brunt, who evidently dissented, but did not care to measure swords with the minister.

“Progress has only given us a sharper definition of facts,” was the reply, “but has never successfully denied them. It has furnished us with details, and corroborated by logic and research what in earlier times was a vague out-reaching of the universal heart. Religion in those days was a ship in a fog, scarcely discern-

ible ; religion nowadays is the same ship when the sun has burnt up the fog, and we see it in its entirety."

"Or perhaps," suggested the Master, who was always happy in his illustrations, "the conception of other days was that of credulous childhood, mingled with many beliefs to be outgrown, while to-day we have the same root-principle fitted to man's estate."

Jessig was restlessly looking over two or three large volumes.

"Let me give you some instances," he said. "When a native Australian wished for initiation as a doctor, he went into a trance of two or even three days' duration. The people believed that during that time he was on a visit to the world of spirits. The Khond priest—the Khonds are ethnologically very interesting, because they are counted among 'the hill tribes' of India—the Khond priest was wont to remain from a week to ten days in a semi-comatose state, and it was thought that his soul

was in the divine presence. When he awoke and reassumed his holy office, his words were listened to with something like awe.

“We retain in certain expressions, constantly used, the persistent remnants of this belief, for we say of a man that he is ‘beside himself,’ that he is ‘in an ecstasy.’ These words are simply the disappearing shadow of an early faith.

“But,” Jessig continued, “this mere acknowledgment of a shadow, or phantom, or soul, which is quite different from the body, and may exist independently of it, does not represent the full extent of savage belief. It is said of the Indians of Brazil that they thought a man at death entered the other world just as he left this—a degree of realism that is painful to contemplate. For example, if he was killed in battle he carried all his wounds with him. Is not this a crude copy of Solomon’s statement, ‘Where the tree falleth, there it shall be’? We are all alike, in all climes and ages,

with such amount of differentiation as superior culture may produce, our culture changing the form of faith, but not obliterating it.

“The different stages in the evolution of this faith are very suggestive. We first meet with the notion that there is a body and a phantom, or the body and ‘the man that looks out of the eye.’ Then we come to something a little more complex, as the custom among the Iroquois Indians, who, when digging a grave, left a hole in the ground, that the soul, not feeling quite at home in its new surroundings, might visit the body once in a while. And once more I call your attention to a curious persistency of ideas, for among the German peasants of to-day there is a dim notion that an open door ought not to be shut suddenly, for fear some soul may be passing through and become injured. A great many of the customs and sayings of our own time refer directly to superstitions that once prevailed extensively.

“If I am not wearying you —”

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“Don’t be afraid of that,” cried Hiram. “I have a sharp appetite, and haven’t had half enough to eat yet.” The old man’s eyes glistened. “It does me good,” he added, “to know that what I believe has been believed everywhere and by everybody. It’s not a new-fangled notion, but is tangled up with the whole race. That makes me feel like shoutin’.”

“The subject is endless,” said Jessig, “but your patience has its limits. There are, however, two or three more facts that I would like to refer to. Among the natives of the Indian Archipelago, for example, slaves were killed at the funeral of a chief, that he might have plenty of attendants in his new life. Before they were dispatched, the relations of the dead man enjoined upon them their duty to keep a watchful care over their master, not to leave him on any account when he fell ill or was lonely, and to be quick in obedience to his orders. This warning having been given, the women slightly wounded them with a spear-point, after which

the men killed them as quickly as possible, that they might join their master.

“Captain Burton relates this further development of the same idea among the natives of Dahomey. After a king’s death it was deemed an act of loyalty to keep him thoroughly informed as to what was going on. Whenever, therefore, a battle was fought, or some important incident happened, a stout fellow who had been taken captive received the message which was intended for the dead monarch, and, after being urged to remember the story and tell it in all its details, was killed, in the belief that he would carry the news to the other world.”

“That is exceedingly interesting,” said the Master, “but let me ask this question: When you leave these children of nature, and arrive among peoples who have reached some stage of civilization, does religion seem to be persistent, or does it begin to lose its hold on mankind? Let me put it in a different way: Does what is called progress develop, or does

it have a tendency to destroy, the religious nature?"

"It is very important to consider that matter," replied Jessig. "If it were true that religion was a peculiarity of the race in its unthinking babyhood, but began to disappear as the race advanced, it would be very serious, if not conclusive. Nothing, however, is more clear than that religion, in some form, has accompanied the race in its journey from the hut of the Kaffir to the imperial splendor of Babylon and Nineveh. We have never been without it, or felt ourselves able to get on without it.

"For instance, the people of India were almost drenched in religious theories. These theories flooded the country, from the mountains in the north to the sea in the south. As to another life, they were by no means satisfied with one, but boldly asserted that several thousand may be necessary before the soul reaches perfection. It goes out of the body at death, but must be reincarnated, must return

again and again until sin is expiated, and it is ready for absorption into the All-in-All.

“Persia, which in the time of Darius held for tribute a territory extending from the Mediterranean to the Himalayas, had a delirium of theology. There were gods and goddesses innumerable. No one doubted their existence; every one felt daily dependence upon them.

“The same is true of Egypt, the land of mystery and cloudless skies. She had a multiplicity of deities, enough to confuse, if not terrify, the ordinary mind. As to Greece and Rome, you are too familiar with them to need reference. Major and minor deities presided over war and peace, over life and death, over forests and streams, over rain and sunshine, and all the products of the ground.

“As you climb the tower in which each age is a stepping-stone to higher things, and look out every now and then at the widening horizon and brightening landscape, you find that theology gradually loses its material and anthropo-

morphic, or human, phase, and becomes more complex. At first the god is a giant warrior, cruel, despotic, savage, but resistless. Immortality is accepted as a fact not to be doubted; but the other world is a place where the suppressed passions of this life will have full swing. All ideas, both of society and of religion, are crude, almost shapeless, mixed with drops of blood and shouts of victory. When you get higher than Olympus, with its gorgeous group of deities, you come, after long struggle, to Christianity, with its God of wisdom and love, with its brotherliness and neighborliness, the noblest conception of duty here and of heaven hereafter that men have ever cherished—a conception so grand that most of us agree in declaring it to be a revelation, and not the product of a human mind. It is not the result of a gradual ascent whose traveled steps you can count, but is a sudden uplifting of the soul to a loftier plane of motive and action, as though some mighty hand had grasped the world and

with a single effort drawn it up to the height occupied by the giant who owned the hand.

“The belief in immortality did not have much moral effect on the life of the early race. It was so material that the system of duties drawn from it was coarse-grained. But Christianity tells us of a future which is a home. We are to go home! We are to rejoin those who have gone before. Heaven is a holy place, filled with the splendor of God’s presence, and we therefore must lead holy lives, that we may have, in the quaint language of Scripture, our ‘wedding garments’ on when we are summoned.”

“Well,” said Hiram, who laid down the poker, with which he had been stirring the logs, but not losing a word the while, “it makes me feel as though this generation was a link in a long chain that reaches ’way back to the Garden of Eden and reaches for’ard to the Day of Judgment. It ain’t no small priv’lege to jine in the general chorus that rose from the lips of the first people on the globe, and has been increasin’

in volum' ever sence, and will grow louder and louder till we are all gathered 'round the Throne of God to shout ' Hallelujah!' ”

The little company were impressed by John Jessig's talk, and seemed unwilling to break the spell of his earnest eloquence by questions. All except Hiram, who seemed to be in a state of exhilaration, and who broke out once more.

“ This glorious religion! ” he cried. “ Why, while you was talkin', parson, I was thinkin' what it was like, what I could compare it to. Then this idee come to me. A man gets a notion that somewhere in the mountains where he has built his hut there must be a lot of gold. He don't know why he believes it, but he does. And he hunts 'round till he picks up a little nugget on the side of a stream. ‘ I knowed it,’ he says to himself. ‘ But there's a good deal more hidden away. I'm too old to find it, but my boys will continue the work.’ And when he dies, leavin' nothin' but this nugget mixed with rock, his children take up the search. They

find another nugget, perhaps two or three, and then they die. Their children do the same thing, and they die. And so the ages pass, bigger and bigger pieces of gold bein' found. But everybody feels that there is a whole mine of it hid away, and they are not satisfied, though they acknowledge that what they've got is val'able. At last an angel comes and says, 'You are huntin' for the mine, be ye?' and they answer, 'Yes.' 'You can't find it yourselves,' he says. 'We know that,' they reply, 'for we've hunted till we're pretty well tuckered out.' 'All right,' says the angel, 'you foller me.' And he leads 'em here, and he leads 'em there, and at last, p'intin', he says, 'There it is!' Then they push away the leaves and the dry brush, and they tremble all over, for right in sight is gold enough to furnish the whole world with plenty. 'Can we have it?' they ask. 'All you can carry,' says the angel, 'and you can keep comin' for more.'

"When God makes anythin' He makes enough

to go 'round, and to spare. And to think that we live in a time when the angel has done that favor, and that we're among them who can have all they want, and can ask their neighbors to come and take all they want, too! Think of bein' as rich as that! No end to it! This world glorified, and heaven invitin' us! It's almost too much for mortals to bear."

It was a very delightful session of the club, and when we came out into the frosty night a million stars peered at us curiously, and the hills, white with snow, seemed like the marble pillars of a great temple.

CHAPTER VI.

A SHOEMAKER'S RELIGION.

I HAD known Hiram Golf three full months, and almost revered the man. He had his eccentricities, was sometimes brusque in manner, and always ungrammatical in speech, but he had a clear, white soul. As you looked into the depths of his gray-blue eyes you felt sure that the man behind them was as honest and loyal and sympathetic as sunshine on a spring morning. I would have made him trustee of all my earthly possessions without asking him to give bonds. God couldn't make the mistake of putting that kind of a head on any human shoulders without putting a nobleman's heart under the ribs.

We knew that Hiram's talk would be worth listening to, and though it was a rugged sort

of night, and the mercury had dropped several degrees below zero, and the wind was running riot through the Cherokee Valley, we were all present in Jessig's study at least ten minutes before the regular hour for meeting. The shoemaker was a magnetic creature, and I doubt if even Jessig himself was more respected by the humble people of Woodbine. He could scold and fret and fume, and, on occasion, exhibit a good deal of rather hot indignation; but it was only when he suspected some trick, some unfair dealing in the narrow public life of the place, and when this or that well-to-do official attempted to manipulate the general opinion in order to secure a personal advantage. It was not always safe to oppose the plan of such an official, for opposition might mean the loss of place, no credit at the corner store, no food for the children, no coal or wood for the kitchen stove. But Hiram never reckoned consequences. He would take the floor in the old tumbledown town-hall, that hadn't been painted

for twenty years, and make the rafters ring. As a general thing he carried his point, for, after all, men prefer to do what is right, if they have a bold and fearless leader who is himself above suspicion.

On this particular night Hiram was in a very happy mood. "I propose," he began, "to chat a little while about a matter that used to tangle me all up, but which has been pretty clear for the last ten year. I ain't presumin' to teach this company nothin', but I'll jest put a match to the discussion, and then you can use the bellers and make it blaze as much as you please.

"I have a notion that we've got too much theology in the world, and too little religion. Now that's my startin'-p'int. Men is bein' ruined by theology, and there ain't religion enough to go 'round. What we want is to sell off all our speckerlations about God and start in to do God's will. When I was younger, I had an idee that if men would think right, they'd

pretty soon get to do right; but I've come to believe that the propersition has got to be turned t'other end to, and we'll make more progress if we say that if a man will do right he'll pretty soon believe right."

"You wouldn't depreciate the value of theology as a background for religion, I hope," suggested Jessig.

"Perhaps I wouldn't," was the rejoinder, "and then again I don't know but I would. I am sure, anyhow, that a man can be a deep theologian and not know much about vital religion, and a man can be a genuine Christian and not know nothin' about theology.

"In my jedgment, theology is a theory about God that is manufactured by men who may be right or may be wrong, while religion is simply God's sayin' to me, 'I made you to be My child, and I want you to act as though you was.'

"Theology is for them that can understand it, and that's mighty few; and even the few don't agree among themselves. Religion is for

everybody. Theology is a luxury, but religion is one of the necessities of life. Leastwise, that is the way I look at it."

"I hardly think you are fair, Hiram," broke in Jessig. "The Church is founded on certain ideas, and its purpose is to propagate those ideas. They are contained in what is called the creed, and the creed is necessary to organized action. Take the creed away, and where would the Church be? Take a man's spinal column away, and the man is simply a lump of jelly."

"I don't agree," cried Hiram, "I don't agree, parson. Your figger about a man's backbone don't hold good; it's very deceivin'. The backbone of your religion isn't your subscribin' to certain propersitions about Christ, but your willin'ness to foller Him. Take the case of Will Black, who shoed horses at the corner. You remember him, parson? He led a pretty stormy life, I reckon. What with bad comp'ny, and a wife that driv him out of the house 'cos there wasn't no comfort in it, he slid down till

there wasn't no lower place to slide to. You got a grip on him yourself, parson, when he was took with pneumony and like to die. You had a heavy tussle with the devil that time, but after a while Will saw that things looked shaky, and promised to reform. We clung to him day and night for three months, and then he sorter caught hold of himself and began to be a man. When he come to you on a Saturday night and told you he wanted to jine the Church, there was tears in your eyes, parson, for I saw 'em. When you named the conditions of jining the Church, you handled the subjec' very delicate, and it was proper you should. You asked him about God, and he was all right, and he said he would pray and try to be saved, and trust in Christ to help him along. But when the rest of the creed was read, he simply said he didn't know nothin' about it. It might be so, and it might not. He wasn't scholar enough to find out, and it had never occurred to him to have any opinions on those subjects.

“There was only two things he was dead sure of, and them was, that he was bound to come out right, and couldn’t do it unless the Lord took special pains to lift him over the hard places.

“Now, parson, these are the words you used on that occasion, and they made me shout ‘Hallelujah!’ You said, ‘Will Black, if you feel that you need a Saviour, you shall jine this church next communion day.’ And, parson, he did, and you hain’t been sorry for it since. Three quarters of the reg’lar creed went for nothin’, and jest a confidin’ trust in the Lord did the whole business.

“It was in the time of Parson Flood,” continued Hiram, “that I came to this conclusion. He was a good man and a noble preacher, but he was fond of discussin’ doctrines, and the church kinder petered out. One partic’lar sermon that acted on my mind in an irritatin’ way was on God’s foreknowledge and man’s free will. I follered him till I got fairly out of

breath, and then give it up, and took a nap. I guess most of the rest did the same thing, for it was a hot afternoon, and the sermon had to be pretty stirrin' to keep us awake.

"Now on Monday, while at my workbench, I kept thinkin' on that subjec', and the more I thought the wuss off I was. I got so wild that at last I couldn't tell a pair of boy's slippers from old Deacon Quimby's number 'levens. Then I sung out to my wife:

" 'Marthy! Marthy! '

" 'Yes, Hiram,' says she, for she was in the next room.

" 'Come here,' says I.

"When she came, she says, 'Hiram, what's the matter? Your eyes is rollin', and your face is red.'

"Says I, 'Marthy, have you always considered me a man of good sense?'

" 'Not remarkable,' answers she, 'not remarkable, Hiram, but somethin' above the average.'

“Then I put down my hammer, and went to the winder for a breath of air. ‘That subjec’,’ says I to myself, ‘is likely to torment the life out of every man who thinks about it. You can’t deny either propersition, and you can’t reconcile ’em. So there you be. Nobody that isn’t above the average in intellec’ can make anythin’ out of it. Therefore,’ says I, ‘it ain’t necessary to salvation, which is the chief thing I’m lookin’ for.’ From that day to this I hain’t thought of it, and I don’t intend to think of it in the future.”

“Hiram,” said the Master, “it would be very interesting if you would relate that part of your personal history in which you convinced yourself that you needed some kind of religion in order to make your life profitable. We don’t wish to be intrusive, and my motive is not one of mere curiosity. The processes of spiritual development are always accompanied by special experiences, and I am sure you have had many of them.”

“Wall,” began Hiram, “it’s a simple story, hardly worth listenin’ to, I expect; but sech as it is, it is at your service. I was one of them who keep goin’ down and don’t begin to climb until they touch bottom. They asked me to believe so much when I was young, that I concluded I’d risk gettin’ along with believin’ nothin’. I was like the feller goin’ up hill with a load of apples, and the tailboard of his cart dropped out, and when he got to the top he didn’t have a single apple. I was loaded up with doctrines, but they got away from me one after the other, until not one of ’em was left. I had an empty cart and an empty heart. That’s the way I trudged along for nigh onto ten year.

“What started me on the right track was old Deacon Badger, who was long before your time, parson. The deacon was the piousest man on Sunday I ever see, but it was terrible dangerous to trade hosses with him on Monday.

“When he was bein’ buried, a hard-headed

old feller said to me, 'Hiram,' says he, 'reck-onin'-day comes to all on us, and it's come to the deacon. I rather suspect that the Lord won't pay much attention to the deacon's Sunday, but'll sorter remark to him, "Deacon Badger, before we settle your affairs, we'll take a look at some of them hoss-trades of yourn," and the old man will wish he hadn't done a good many things.'

"That set me to thinkin', and I had a pretty restless time of it for a whole month. You see, the deacon had about all the doctrines he could hold, and every one of 'em was sound and jest as orthodox as they could be. But the Lord would skip the doctrine and take up the hoss-trades. 'Well,' says I to myself, 'that looks like business; and if there's any religion anywhere that puts honesty of life fust and foremost, I guess I'll take a peek at it, and see how it'll suit my case.'

"So I took my New Testament down, and, without sayin' nothin' to nobody, began to

make up my own mind about things. Thinks I, 'I'm not goin' to Parson Burnham to find out what this means. I'm goin' straight to Christ Himself. If I like what He says, and it seems reasonable, I'll foller; and if I don't like it, I won't; that's the long and short of it.' I was sittin' under a hay-mow that August afternoon, and my eyes lighted on this passage in the Gospel of Luke: 'For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.' 'Well,' thinks I, 'that is a very p'inted and personal remark. It means me, Hiram Golf, the young scapegrace, if it means anythin'. He came on purpose to save some one, and He is so determined to do it that He don't wait for the sinner to come to Him.' There was some-thin' rather hospitable and friendly and touchin' about that, and I kep' ponderin' it until nigh sundown. That's where I started.

"Then I thought I should like to know what this Seeker after my soul wanted me to do, and another passage met my eye. It was in Mat-

thew, and it said: 'The Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.' It seemed to me rather cur'us that the Bein' who come to save the lost shouldn't find no place where He could be comfortable. Thinks I, 'Is that quite a fair statement? He did have friends, and they were always glad to see Him.' I kep' those words in my mind, until it come to me that it didn't refer to His body, but to His soul, and He meant that after lookin' over the world there wasn't no place where His new ideas of God and duty and heaven could find a restin'-place. Thinks I to myself, 'The Lord is right, Hiram. Take your own soul, for example. Is there any corner of it where the Saviour could find a home for Himself?' And I was compelled to answer that there wasn't. If other folks was like me, coarse and selfish, there was somethin' to make the tears come in them words, 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.'

“ I determined that if the Lord and I could agree—and it looked as though we was goin’ to—I’d make a place where He should always find a welcome. Still, I wanted to look further. My sympathies was roused, but I like to go into things with my eyes open, so I read a good deal more before comin’ to a conclusion. I found that the fust thing was to repent. That didn’t seem hard, because I saw plain enough that my way of livin’ wasn’t square and wouldn’t satisfy me. ‘ All right,’ thinks I, ‘ I am sorry for the past, and want to get hold of something better.’

“ Then next the Teacher said, ‘ Our Father, which art in heaven.’ He didn’t speak of *His* Father and nobody’s else. What He taught wasn’t narrer like that. It was ‘ *Our* Father,’ which meant a powerful lot to me. I haven’t no right to say ‘ *My* Father,’ but I must pray just as though the human race was all children together, and we should recognize that fact every time we use the word ‘ our.’ I can’t tell you

how I felt when I saw what a big thing that kind of religion is; and it was cur'us that soon afterward I should stumble on those two verses in which Christ sums up the whole duty of man in these words: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.' That, He said, was commandment number one, and number two was, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' I trembled from head to foot when I thought that them two commandments was about all there was to 'the law and the prophets.'

"'Why,' says I, 'there ain't nothin' to disagree about. You couldn't get up a discussion on them questions if you tried to. It don't need no study to understand sech requirements. The greatest scholar and the most ignorant loom-tender could shake hands as to the propriety of doin' both of them things.

"'Now,' says I, 'I guess I've got where I want to be. I don't see how God could possibly look down and see all of His creatures

goin' astray without sendin' some one to help put things right; and if He sent any message at all, it was just my idee that He would send the one I've been talkin' about. He couldn't keep silent, and He couldn't send no better word than that. So,' I says, 'that's my kind of religion. I've been a long time gettin' to it, but I've arrived at last, and if the Lord wants my help He shall have it.'

"I went down on my knees that night, and I said, 'O Lord, Hiram has been pretty well rattled in the past, and there's a good many things he'd like to have You forget. Cover up my sins, for the dear Lord's sake, and make use of me any way You see fit.'

"That was my conversion, and from that time to this I ain't had no doubts.

"But when I got all through, I said to myself, 'Hullo, Hiram, where is them doctrines that Parson Flood used to preach about, and pound the pulpit cushion till us boys watched the dust fly and grew frightened?' And I

answered, 'Hiram, if Christ didn't say much about 'em, you can afford to keep still.' So I haven't bothered myself to find out whether I accepted the creed or not, but have been satisfied to accept Christ, and foller Him in my shoemaker's way.'

Van Brunt was a curious study during this long recital. He had evidently anticipated very little pleasure, and at the beginning of the evening had an air of despondency and weariness. Perhaps Hiram's bad grammar and his homely similes annoyed him, or possibly he was too preoccupied to enter into the spirit of the occasion. At any rate, he was listless, and for a time wholly indifferent.

But when the shoemaker grew warm and earnest, Van Brunt, I noticed, turned around in his chair, that he might get a better view of the shoemaker's face, and before the speaker had finished he had captured Van Brunt's entire attention. Indeed, he was the first to ask a question.

"Hiram," he said, "when a man is in the midst of trouble, do you think it possible to love the God who sent it? Can you respect a being who gives you a tremendous blow?"

"That depends on what kind of a God you've got, and what He give you the blow for," was the ready answer. "If God is simply exhibitin' His power when He hits you, I don't think I should praise Him very much; but if He hurts in order to help, you may feel the pain of the hurt, but you needn't blame Him for doin' it. When Widow Bigelow's son Robert got run over, we had a surgeon come up from the city, with his knives and needles. He looked the boy all over, and then said, 'Robert, I'm goin' to hurt you, but no more than I can help. If I do this, you will get well, and be as strong as ever; if I don't do it, I can't answer for the consequences.' I was lookin' on at the time, and I guess I grew faint, for, I had to set down and open the winder for fresh air. Robert couldn't keep from groanin',

for there was six stitches to be took, and a lot of probin' to be done, which ain't exac'ly pleasant. But he stood it, and got well, and is doin' day's work at the mill this winter. The surgeon wasn't cruel, though he seemed so. He was doin' the best thing for the boy, and at the same time hurtin' him awful bad. That's the way it is with God."

"The power to endure affliction," added the Master, "depends very largely on your mental attitude. If you have faith that there is a holy purpose in it, as there was in the surgeon's knife that Hiram speaks of, you minimize the actual and necessary suffering; but if you feel that an invisible being is wrenching you out of caprice, your helplessness adds to your agony. The heaviest blow that love gives is not so hard to bear as the slightest touch of the finger of hate. Despotism is one thing; discipline is quite different. The despot afflicts for his own pleasure; the Father disciplines for the sufferer's good."

“And can it be true,” persisted Van Brunt, “that if I become enamored of the beauty of Christ’s life and do my honest endeavor to follow His example, loving my fellowmen and forgiving my enemies, throwing myself on His mercy to blot out my shortcomings—can it be true that that short ‘credo’ is all that is absolutely necessary to salvation?”

His face flushed as he said this, and his eyes gleamed with a brightness which denoted considerable excitement.

Hiram, sitting at the right of the big fireplace, simply nodded assent.

“Then religion, such a religion,” said Van Brunt, “so far from being a mystery, is the simplest thing in the world, and the most attractive, and the most beautiful.”

The talk ran on smoothly for another half-hour, and then Jessig brought in the urn and gave us a cup of steaming hot coffee before we went out into the frosty night.

CHAPTER VII.

WHERE IS HEAVEN?

OF all the discussions of that memorable winter, the one that most sharply impressed itself on my memory was on the subject of immortality. This is perhaps natural, because the intensest yearnings of the human heart reach out in that direction.

The discussion came about in this wise. We had all been to a tearless funeral that afternoon; not tearless because grief was shallow, but because it was too deep to find relief in sobs. The Widow Grindley had lost her only child.

Poverty had been her daily companion for years, but she had become accustomed to its pinching cruelty, and bore it with wonderful patience. Her life was like one long Novem-

ber day—a fretting chill in the air, a nipping frost on the window-pane, dull gray clouds throwing their somber shadows on the fields. But she minded none of these things, for she had Harry, a curly-headed boy of ten, who used to cheer the weary mother's soul by telling her that he should find a fortune some day, would marry the most beautiful girl in the world, the veritable daughter of a veritable king, and then build a palace of gold for her, where great genii would come up from the floor like a cloud of smoke, and do whatever she told them to. She should have a dozen of them, and they would have nothing to do except to bring her everything she wanted. While he was painting the future in these glowing colors, he ate his supper of bread and milk as contentedly as though he had been a prince. She sighed as his lips trembled with excitement in the recital, but could not find it in her heart to check his enthusiasm. The world was all magic to the imaginative boy,

and he grew eloquent as he said, "Mamma, I'm growing fast, and it won't be long before I shall be a man, and then—" but the little fellow got sleepy by that time, and was soon tucked up in bed. The mother kissed his eyelids, and told the dear Lord that she didn't care for the palace and the genii, but hoped He would spare Harry and make him an honest man.

That afternoon, however, we buried him. Kind neighbors crowded the humble parlor and offered such words of sympathy as they could command, but they knew, and we all knew, that words, though never so well chosen, could afford no relief. The poor mother was dazed, and when I looked at her white face and stony stare I knew that she must weep or her heart would break.

John Jessig was an angel of light on that occasion. His voice was so like an echo at first that it reminded me of a distant strain of music. He spoke for nearly twenty minutes, and in

such an assuring way and in such simple language that I was profoundly affected. When he mentioned Harry's name, and declared that the dream of his childhood would be realized, that he was really getting ready the palace of gold which he had so often described, and would some day welcome the mother, I heard first a moan from the corner of the room, and then a stifled cry of agony. After that came the flood of tears which perhaps saved the good woman's life.

In the evening, as we all sat about the bright and cheery fire, that burial scene was the uppermost thought in everybody's mind.

The Master said, pithily and with great pathos, "The immortal life makes this life endurable. If a man has no future he has no present. To-morrow's sun shining on to-day makes the path easy to climb. If we are never to wake when we sleep, it is a pity we are here at all. Tell that mourning woman that her boy is under the sod, and you crush her; tell her

he is in heaven, and she finds solace in the stars, for they whisper strange things in her ears, glad tidings of great joy."

Then silence fell upon us, broken only by the crackling of the blazing logs. We were all thinking of that desolate home, of the widowed and childless mother, and of the dear Christ who said to a sorrowing world, "Let not your heart be troubled. I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am, there ye may be also."

The silence had perhaps lasted five minutes, when Jessig reached out his hand, took down a volume of Jean Ingelow, and in an impressive voice read these lines:

"And yet I know, past all doubting, truly,
A knowledge greater than grief can dim,
I know, as He loved, He will love me duly,
Yea, better, e'en better than I love Him.

"And as I walk by the vast, calm river,
The awful river so dread to see,
I say, "Thy breadth and thy depth forever
Are bridged by His thoughts that cross to me."'"

I can't describe the effect of those simple words upon us all. Hiram bowed his head on his broad chest and whispered, "Thank God!" But Van Brunt's face was a study for a painter. He tried to look stern, or at least indifferent, but the effort was futile. His lips twitched, and he never knew that I saw two tears steal down his wan and troubled face.

"But why," he hoarsely whispered, "why must these things be? What is the meaning of separation, and what good purpose can it possibly subserve?" then sank back exhausted.

"The discipline of life," answered the Master, very tenderly, for he had long ago learned something of Van Brunt, "the discipline of life is the best that Omniscience could devise to make the soul all He intended it to be.

"If man were a mere machine, he would run smoothly from the beginning to the end; but since he is a free agent, he must be taught to choose the good. Man's will and God's meth-

ods, working in unison, produce a saint. Man's will and God's methods in antagonism produce misery. The purpose of religion is to bring man and God together, into conscious communication with each other, that man, seeing God's fatherliness, may learn how to say, 'Not my will, but Thine.' "

Hiram looked up from the fire and said, "Brother, in heaven we shall learn that the Master is right. Lookin' for'ard, it seems dark; lookin' back, it will be made clear. Death is the only path to the top, and death is not to be reckoned a misfortune, but a priv'lege."

"That is strange doctrine," answered Van Brunt, with something like a sigh.

"I'm not overstatin' it, am I, parson?" continued Hiram. "So I thought. The Apostle went as far as that when he said, 'To die is gain.' He was only half willin' to stay, but even that surprises me, since he knew what the Lord had stored up for him. He was in a hurry

to begin the enjoyment of heaven, as we should be if the other life was as clear to us as it was to him."

"Ah, yes," cried Van Brunt, "but who can have a faith like that—a faith that looks up and says, 'I am sure'—a faith that anticipates the change with pleasure? It is impossible, impossible! Heaven is so vague, so misty, and so mysterious! It is a good deal like our conception of Nowhere."

"That is our mistake," broke in the Master. "The world has that notion—and a very persistent notion it is—and therefore the world looks upon death with dread. But give heaven a location, think of it as you think of France or Germany, teach your soul that when it leaves the body it will go to *a place*, will enjoy the companionship of those it loved in this life, and all fear is gone, and in its stead is high anticipation."

"But where is your authority for such an assertion?" asked Van Brunt, nervously.

“For the assertion that heaven is a distinct location, and not, as so many preachers tell us, ‘a state’?”

Van Brunt nodded his head wearily.

“I find it everywhere in the New Testament,” was the answer. “Yes, everywhere. ‘I go to prepare *a place* for you.’ To the poor creature on the cross by His side Jesus said, ‘This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.’ The Book of Revelation furnishes us with an entrancing picture of ‘the Holy City,’ giving us the details of its materials and measurements.”

“And do you take all that as a statement of fact?” asked Van Brunt.

“In a very important sense, yes,” was the answer. “John’s vision has been accepted as a part of God’s authorized Word. He caught a glimpse of heaven, and it seemed to him to be as material as the earth and the cities thereof. Then he saw it no more; but ‘the Holy City,’ though invisible, is as truly there as ever, and we shall be numbered among its citizens.”

"I am glad to hear you say that," remarked Jessig, "for it seems to me essential to a vital faith. As Mr. Van Brunt said a few minutes ago, heaven to most people is as impossible to locate as Nowhere. But why should we entertain such vague notions when the plain truth is within reach? While the soul is connected with the body it has a local habitation. Whether it can, under any circumstances, make excursions from the body or not, I cannot say; but at any rate, the body is its natural domicile, which it owns in fee simple, the title being granted by the Creator of both. Why, then, should not the soul have a local habitation when it exchanges the physical body for what St. Paul calls the spiritual body? For myself, I can't conceive of a soul not occupying space."

"But we can see the body," broke in Van Brunt. "Why, then, can't we see the soul, if there is one?"

"Because," answered Jessig, "we look with physical eyes and can therefore only see physi-

cal things. When souls leave their bodies and go into the other life to occupy spiritual bodies, there is nothing strange in the fact that we can't see either the soul or the spiritual body with the rude instrument of physical vision, but that is no argument for their non-existence."

The Master bowed his head in approval.

"Behold the marvel of marvels," he said. "For a time the soul, which is always visible to the angels and to God, dwells in a tenement made of material so much coarser than itself that while it can see the body the body cannot catch sight of it. If you lock a quantity of oxygen gas in a glass jar, the gas might see the jar, but the jar could not see the gas. The gas is no less real than the jar, and the jar is no more real than the gas, and invisibility or visibility has nothing to do with the facts of the case. A thousand glass jars might meet in solemn conclave for the purpose of investigation, honestly desiring to get at the truth; but what could they discover? They might conclude

that there was *probably* something in the jar, but they could go no further.

“Without revelation, that is where the argument for immortality stands to-day. Natural religion makes another life probable, but that is all. Christ, however, not only preached immortality, but in His own person exhibited it.”

“Pray explain,” cried Van Brunt, whose cheeks were flushed with excitement.

“The historic Christ,” continued the Master, “was in all points like ourselves. What happened to Him, therefore, may happen to us. He died and was placed in the tomb. The last farewells were said, and His tearful followers, just as doubtful of a literal resurrection as many of us, went their several ways in mournful, if not bitter, disappointment. But the end had not come. There was another act in that tragedy, and on that the hope and faith of the whole world depend. Christ said to His disciples, ‘On the third day I will rise again;’ but the statement must have been accepted with

hesitation, for there is no record of any one who believed it could be true. It was too great a fact for mere fishermen and their friends to appreciate, or for any one else, however learned he might be. But on that third day the tomb was empty. That was appalling; but there were ways, so they said, to account for the disappearance. The body had perhaps been stolen while the guards slept. But afterward, this very Christ who had made the prediction appeared on various occasions to His disciples. They walked with Him, they talked with Him, not once, but at least three times, and their testimony is a part of the record.

“Christ was visible, and then again He was invisible. This was accomplished perhaps by the exercise of agencies not known to us. While the disciples were talking, He was gone. When they assembled in ‘the upper room’ the doors were shut, and yet He was suddenly in their midst. Some have declared that there is a fourth dimension of space which makes this

possible. I do not know. I take the story as it stands, and accept the truth it teaches.

“Soul and body live together for a time. When the soul goes, that is the end of the body; when the body goes, that is not the end of the soul. The house may be pulled down, but the man who lived in it may go forth and seek another home for himself.”

Van Brunt simply remarked, “That is all very beautiful, if one can believe it.”

“What you wish to emphasize, I take it,” added Jessig, “is the fact that soul occupies space just as truly as body does. The oxygen gas occupied space just as truly as the glass jar did. You can’t conceive of the soul not being somewhere, in some place, and Jesus made it plain when He referred to the ‘house not made with hands.’ A house as much as this is! ‘In My Father’s house are many mansions.’ It is always a real soul and a real place. Our difficulty is that we dream an immortality, but do not personally realize it.”

“Well,” said Hiram, “that is tremendously interestin’. I’ve puzzled over that many a time when I was drivin’ pegs, but somehow it always got away from me. Why, of course; I wonder I didn’t think of it before. God can see us, and the angels can see each other, but no man ever sees his feller-man, only the tenement he lives in. And so some people come to believe that there ain’t no man inside the tenement. Bimeby, though, when we get spiritual bodies, the eyes will be better instruments to look through, and then we shall see each other for the first time.”

It was evident that Van Brunt was still unsatisfied. There were other questions which he wanted to ask, and he moved restlessly in his chair.

“But if this eternal home is in some place,” he said, “where is that place? Can we know anything about it? Can we locate it? Or do we get just so far and then the fog settles down and we are helpless? The longing to know

more is painful, but, it seems to me, entirely natural."

"I don't know that it is necessary," resumed the Master, "to know the latitude and longitude of heaven, to have it laid down on our celestial chart as London or Berlin is marked on our maps. If we know that it is somewhere, either near the earth or in interstellar regions, and that it is not so far away but that the departed can return to succor and encourage us, we have the important facts. If we believe that they are engaged in various ministries, are pursuing certain vocations —"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Van Brunt, "that, I see, is the second point you wish to make, and my curiosity is aroused. You said at the first meeting of this club that our religious views should be based on common sense. What, then, can you say of the occupations of those who have gone? Surely the old worn-out story of an eternal vocal exercise, of continuous harping

and singing, does not commend itself to the rational mind."

"Not to mine," cried Hiram, "not to mine. It would be pretty dull business for me to set down to a harp, for I hain't no ear for music. I reckon that after the first half-hour the Lord would say, 'Hiram, I guess you'd better stow that thing in the corner somewhere. You're excused from the musical part of the program.'"

"The heaven you describe," said the Master to Van Brunt, "would be exceedingly unattractive. In a word, it wouldn't be heaven at all. You are right in saying our common sense does not accept such a picture. Of course, those employments which are dependent on our physical organs will be dispensed with. There will be no money-making, no building of houses, no pursuits which have their origin in avarice or selfishness. But these are characteristic of man on his lowest plane."

"Then some men," suggested Hiram, "will

have a very small amount of raw material left to begin the new life with, and it will take 'em quite a while to get used to it."

"That is only another way of saying," remarked Jessig, "that if a man soaks himself in this worldliness, he will not be well equipped for the order of things in heaven; and it is entirely true. He will be a stranger on the other shore, and —"

"And he will be a little child," broke in the Master, "with this difference, that he will not have the child's innocence. This world demands and should receive a devoted attention; but to live as though there were no other life, to have your whole nature centered in the pleasures that are connected with the body, is the mistake which religion was designed to warn us against."

"Yes," said Van Brunt, "but take the man of intellect, the astronomer, the philosopher, the mathematician, the lover of art—these are certainly no mean pursuits, and yet you would not say —"

"Why not?" asked Jessig.

"I hardly know why not, and yet they seem to me inconsistent with the joys of heaven."

"I can't quite agree with you," said the Master. "Eating and drinking, sensuous as well as sensual indulgence, the rivalries of business, are not characteristic of the ideal man, but the pursuits of the intellect are. The astronomer will have ample opportunity for investigation, and the chemist and philosopher likewise. There is a wide field which cannot be explored in this life, and there is no reason why those studies should not be pursued hereafter."

"Then your heaven," persisted Van Brunt, "is for the gifted only—a select heaven, in which the poor man has no place."

"On the contrary," cried Jessig. "The cry of the poor man has been ringing through the ages, namely, that his necessities press him so closely that he is intellectually undeveloped. He wants only eight hours of labor instead of twelve, that he may have some home life, may

train himself for a higher grade of citizenship, and give his mind and soul a chance to widen. In the other world, where the need of daily sustenance will not enslave him, he will have the very opportunity for which he has been calling. He can then become a real man, and do the things which he says he has always wanted to do but couldn't."

"Aren't you making the other life a good deal like this one?" asked Van Brunt.

"Certainly," said the Master, "like, but better. The man will not change at death. If God was satisfied when He created man, why should death do more than give him a larger opportunity? Heaven will be the high-school in the system of universal education, in which this is but the primary school. Hiram, what do you think?"

"Well, I reckon I should miss my lapstone and my awl, and my crutch and my rheumatism for a while, but I rather think I could get along without 'em. My idee is that I shall be

just as much Hiram Golf the day after death as I shall be the day before."

"We shall all be changed in the twinkling of an eye," broke in Van Brunt.

"Yes, I hope so," answered Hiram, quickly. "I do indeed hope and believe so. And if the Lord should come down to the earth, and I hobbled up to Him and caught hold of His garment, as I certainly should, and He should turn and say, 'Hiram, throw that crutch away, and be young again,' my rheumatism would go in the twinklin' of an eye, and I'd make kindlin'-wood of the crutch, and I'd dance as I did when I was twenty. But I should be Hiram all the same. If the Lord should say to me, 'Hiram Golf, be somebody else, be Elijah Wilkins, be Jon'than Higby,' that would be pretty serious. Hiram Golf would die right there on the spot, and there would be some one else standin' in his shoes. If death is goin' as far as that, then there ain't no immortality for me. It's only a figger of speech, and don't mean

nothin'. No, I've got to be Hiram all the way along, changin', of course, to suit my new surroundin's, but not changin' so that I won't know myself. Isn't that so, parson?"

"Yes," said Jessig, "you have the truth of the matter. We began with our common sense, and we've looked at things in the light of it ever since, and it won't do to give it up now."

"But all this seems to me very material," suggested Van Brunt.

"And very real," added Hiram.

"Then if we preserve our personality we may also preserve our affections," remarked Van Brunt.

"That is the third point to which our attention should be directed," said the Master. "The conclusion which Mr. Van Brunt draws is inevitable. It is the necessary deduction from the teaching of the New Testament. Certain physical relations will cease, but all soulful relations will continue. Love doesn't die, is not buried in the grave. The dear ones,

nearer the throne than we, love us still. Our love for God and Christ is unbroken. It will be the same then that it is now, only purer and deeper. If this love of God continues, why not our other loves?"

"And they think of us?" asked Van Brunt, nervously.

Jessig repeated these lines — by the way, he reads poetry admirably —

"Are there voices in the valley
Lying near the heavenly gate?
When it opens, do the harp-strings,
Touched within, reverberate?

"When, like shooting stars, the angels
To your couch at nightfall go,
Are their swift wings heard to rustle?
Tell me! for you know."

"If they were in Europe and we in America," said the Master, "they would think of us. Why should they not think of us, though they are in heaven and we on earth? They carry themselves into the other life, and mem-

ory is a part of themselves. If they remember us, do you see any reason why they should cease to love us?"

"Then," began Van Brunt, but he suddenly stopped. "Pardon me," he went on the next instant, "I have already engrossed too much of your attention," and he sank back in his chair, heated and flushed.

"On the contrary," said Jessig, "your questions have been pertinent and important. They have, in fact, given shape to the evening's discussion."

"I hesitate," said Van Brunt, with suppressed excitement, "from a purely selfish motive, I fear. If my question could only be answered according to my hope! But no, I think not."

"Perhaps not," said the Master, very quietly. "Still, if it is in the line of our talk, you should feel perfectly free."

"I wanted to say," Van Brunt continued, in a husky voice, "that only one thing is left to be desired. You have spoken of a real soul, of

a real heaven, which is a real place, and of a personality which triumphs over death. If our dear ones are there, and they do love us still, is it wholly impossible for them under any circumstances to communicate with us? I fear you think me rash, but I cannot help it."

We held our breath for an instant, for Van Brunt was in deadly earnest, and tremulous with violent emotions. No one but the Master had a right to reply, and we waited for him to break the silence.

"Do you believe," he said, in a half whisper, "do you believe that God your Father is with you when you call on Him, that He veritably answers your prayer because He hears it, as you might hear your child's voice?"

"I can't help believing it," was the response.

"I hope so," continued the Master. "If your child were sick or in a strait, and should cry to you, would you hear it?"

"O Heaven!" cried Van Brunt, as though in anguish, "of course I would."

“Is God less fatherly than you?” and the Master seemed like a prophet of old. He, too, was excited, but it did not show in his manner.

Van Brunt leaned forward to catch every word, and the muscles of his face twitched, and his hands moved restlessly.

“Do you remember that Jesus said, ‘I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you’? And do you recall that other wondrous promise, ‘If a man love Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and We’ — that is, both the Father and Himself — ‘We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him’?”

“Yes, yes,” almost moaned Van Brunt, “but is it possible? Is it a fact or a dream?”

“And do you remember that ‘the angel of the Lord’ appeared to Joseph, prophesying the birth of Jesus, and that ‘the angel of the Lord’ came to him a second time, when the young Babe was in danger, and warned him to flee with the Child?”

Van Brunt hung his head, but his bosom heaved, and the veins in his forehead stood out.

"Yes, I have read the story," he cried.

"The fact is established, then," persisted the Master, "that God comes, that His Son, our Saviour, comes, and that the angels come. The principle, therefore, is conceded. It is too late to talk of the impossible. Facts are not to be denied. If they could come then, why not now? Has God closed and bolted the doors of His house? If angels can come, why should our dear ones desert us? It is love for us that brings the Father; why shouldn't the same love bring those who have so lately crossed the river? The chain of reasoning is strong in every link, and the chain of evidence is undeniable in every fact.

"In very truth, the other world floods this world with its beauty, and the departed are nearer to us, very much nearer than we dare to think. As God is here, at this moment, so perhaps are they."

I never saw a more impressive scene than that. Hiram sat gazing, gazing into the fire, but seeing more than he had words to describe. Jessig folded his hands, and his face was radiant. Van Brunt closed his eyes, leaned his head on the back of the chair, and heaved a long sigh, I thought, of relief.

After a little, and without uttering a word of comment on the discussion, we put on our overcoats, shook hands, said good-night very quietly, and wended our way homeward.

CHAPTER VIII.

WAS IT A VISION?

“FEBRUARY 10th. Have I been suddenly smitten with insanity? Is it possible that I have either lost all control of myself, or am on the verge of doing so? I have lived through this long, this glorious, this awfully portentous day, but that is all I can say. Part of the time I was up in the clouds, my heart bursting with a new-found joy and hope, and part of the time I was in the very bowels of the earth, in darkness and unmeasured agony of soul. What experiences I have gone through! Ecstasy alternating with despair! Now in the heaven of boundless bliss, and then falling ‘from morn to noon, from noon to dewy eve.’ The strain on me has been something terrible.

“The more I think of that strange experi-

ence, the less I understand it. But what an exhausted and at the same time exhilarated condition I have been in! In all my life there is no day that equals this one. My hope that what I have seen has some significance — ah me! if I could only believe that —

“ ‘Then whatever sky’s above me,
Here’s a heart for any fate.’

“ But then comes my fear that a skillful physician would say it was simply the result of natural causes, of over-cerebration, or something of that sort—that it was all an hallucination, an illusion, and has no meaning whatever. That is a very depressing thought, and yet it is better to be depressed than deceived. The most horrid truth must be preferred to a falsehood, though it has the gorgeous coloring of a rainbow. Heigho! I don’t know where I am, nor what I am, and can’t seem to find out. It is all so mysterious, and perhaps — that’s what hurts me — so misleading.

“ If I could trust that experience, if I could only trust it, I would go down on my knees and thank God for everything—yes, even for those two mounds in the churchyard where Clara and little Gooby lie. Where the wife and child lie? Do they really lie in that churchyard? I feared so until just now ; but for two hours last night I was sure that they were both in heaven, and I longed for death, that I might rejoin them. Heaven! Is there such a place? Are they there? Shall I go there, or can I go there? What a thought! God help me, but I am perishing in this sea of wonder and doubt.

“ It was utterly impossible to hold my secret. I am generally reticent, have no confidential friends, always keep my private affairs under lock and key ; but in this instance I was forced to seek an interpreter. The difference between blazing noon and a starless midnight—and I didn’t know what was to be my lot—drove me, as though some unseen being were lashing me—drove me, in spite of myself, to tell it all

to some one. But to whom? That was the question.

“Not able to make up my mind, I hastily put on my overcoat, and rushed into the street. The words, ‘The right man will appear at the right time,’ rang in my ears, and under the impulse of the moment I hurried along. No one in sight! Positively no one, not even a farmer, or a store-keeper, or a mill hand! ‘Ah ha!’ I cried, ‘I am the victim of invisible demons. They have been playing a practical joke on me, and this is the way it turns out. I am a fool, a driveling idiot, yearning for the impossible, stretching my hand out with the hope of catching the sun or the moon or the stars.’ But those words still rang in my ears, and they assumed a tone that was imperative even to harshness. ‘The right man will appear at the right time!’ ‘Nonsense! I will go home, take a dose of chloral to calm my nerves, and if I happen to take an overdose, so much the better. I can bear this torture no longer. Let

the farce end, and let me come to my senses, and be a man again—a poor, miserable, wretched man, but still a man.’

“So I turned on my heels abruptly, and there, directly in front of me, stood—the Master. I came near fainting on the spot. The blood all rushed into my heart, and I felt that my face was white as snow. Moreover, I trembled in every limb, for the right man had really appeared at just the right time. I think he divined my condition, knew that something unusual had occurred, for he quietly put his arm through mine, and as we walked along he said, ‘Mr. Van Brunt, I have just called at your rooms, and was disappointed not to find you. You are not feeling quite well, and perhaps I may be of assistance.’ Then he added, ‘Or possibly you may prefer to be alone. Pray be frank.’

“‘Come with me,’ I answered, huskily, for my words came with difficulty. ‘Let us not talk here, but in my room I will tell you all.’

“Not a word did he speak from that moment, and I was grateful for his silence. But I was conscious of leaning on him, at times, very heavily, for the strength had all gone out of me. What a magnificent creature he is! His large head, covered with white hair, his broad shoulders, his firm step, like that of a king. I had often admired them, but they then impressed me with a feeling akin to reverence. Not a word did he utter, and not a word did I utter. We simply walked side by side, shoulder to shoulder—that man of steadfast faith and mild eye, and I, racked and torn, and dizzy as with vertigo.

“When we reached my room, I locked the door—what for, I don’t know—and pointed to a chair. He took off his coat with the deliberate air of one who knows that he has some special work to do and is quite ready to do it. Then, sitting there by my window, through which the sun shone as though it were weaving a halo about his head, he waited for me to speak.

“I told him all, and during the recital there were tears in my eyes, and a great ache in my heart. Yes, I told him every detail from the beginning to the end, and he opened not his mouth until I had finished. At one moment he looked grave even to severity, and I expected him to chide me; but the next moment there was something like a smile on his lips, as he nodded in assent to my statements.

“When it was all over, I said, ‘Master, was it a delusion, or was I dreaming? Is that experience wholly without significance, a glorious bubble that has entranced me, but will burst at the first rude wind?’

“Do you know what it is to hang, literally to hang, on a man’s words? Do you know what I mean when I tell you that in the short interim between my questions and his answer a cold perspiration broke out all over me? I felt as I imagine a soul must feel when at the Judgment it is awaiting the verdict which is to decide its eternal future.

“ He took from his pocket a small Bible, and, turning over its leaves, came to this passage, which he read :

“ ‘ “And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.” ’

“ ‘ But, Master,’ I cried, ‘ I am not a prophet, not even a humble servant of the Most High. I have rebelled against Him; I have almost cursed Him for the afflictions which He has forced me to bear.’

“ His voice was gentle and pathetic as he answered, ‘ My dear brother, these are not the matters we are considering just now. Let us deal simply with facts. – The mountain was filled with invisible beings, and when the Lord saw fit, the young man’s eyes were opened, and he saw for a little time what Elisha had seen all the time. It is the fact that these beings were

there, and that it was possible under certain circumstances to catch a glimpse of them, that we have to do with.'

"He then turned to the New Testament, and read the story of Christ's temptation, ending with the declaration that 'angels came and ministered unto Him.'

"'The ministry of angels,' he said, 'is a conspicuous part of the revelation of God. There is, we are told, "a cloud of witnesses" who keep guard over us, and when Christ rebuked Peter for using violence, He said, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels?"

"'Our dear ones are all there,' he continued, 'fathers and mothers, wives and children, all there,' — I thought his voice trembled, and wondered if he too had suffered as I was suffering — 'and all here. There are times when they make themselves known to us, and such an experience as that which you have just passed

through should be regarded as a sacred privilege, for which no amount of gratitude can be too great.'

" 'Do you mean,' I asked, 'do you really mean that there is a single ray of hope for me in what occurred? Was it a vision in reality, and had it any relation whatever to my dear ones? O Master, if you can assure me of that, my lips shall never murmur again, and my heart will be filled with unspeakable happiness.' I was so utterly overcome that I buried my face in my hands.

" 'Christianity,' he answered, 'is communion with God and Christ. That is the essence of religion. "I will give My angels charge concerning thee, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." Do you need this help, my brother? Are you willing to accept it at the hands of the dear Saviour? Will you take Him to be your Guide, your personal Friend, your daily Companion? Then why should He not keep His promises, why not give you in a vision a sight of those

loved ones, who have never ceased to think of and to love you, and who are looking forward to the time when in an eternal Home you and they will be together again? Your child would lead you to the Father; your wife would comfort and console you. She bids you bear your grief as Jesus bore His. The heavens have opened to you, and you have seen the glory of the Redeemer. You are no longer an alien and a stranger, for God Himself sent you last night, by these dear messengers, an invitation to put on the wedding-garment and get ready for the marriage-feast of the Lamb.'

"Before I go further, let me tell you the story that I told the Master.

"Not knowing what else to do, tired of myself and of my surroundings, I hired a team of John Benson, who has three horses to rent at the other end of the village, and took a long drive. Even in this cold weather, when the air seems full of snowflakes, the landscape is very beautiful. Somber, to be sure, made so by frozen

fields, trees stripped of their leaves, bleak winds, clouds of leaden hue, and shadows which the high hills cast over the valley; but all these things rather fitted my mood. I jogged along leisurely, letting the horse walk or trot as he preferred — and most of the time he had a decided preference for walking — and although I didn't exactly enjoy myself, I was at least less miserable than is usual with me.

“When I passed Johnson's farmhouse, a flock of pigeons — there must have been nearly a hundred of them, for Johnson is something of a crank in that direction — rose from the roof of his barn, and seemed to be having a grand good time in the air. What freedom of motion! Think of poising in mid-heaven, looking disdainfully down on all the trivial things below, and then with a sweep of the wings careering through space! There is magic in it, and I envied the birds.

“Farther on I heard the twitter of a thrush, and thought I saw a nest on the upper bough

of a tall white birch. The little fellow had a merry note, and I reined in my horse to listen. It came again and again, and although I was glad to know that anything was happy, I was at the same time almost indignant that it could be so. I envied the bird, but thought him foolish to pretend to be happy when the cold winter was all around him. Then the wind came sougling through the pines, and it was as mournful as the tones of a huge æolian harp. That was too much for me, and I brought the whip down on the horse's back in a way that surprised him into a sharp trot. He got over his wonder in a few minutes, however, and resumed his dismal walk. He was just the horse to hire if you don't care whether you go four miles an hour or spend four hours on a mile. I suppose the Lord didn't put any 'go' into him, and so the poor creature is not to be blamed.

"It was eight o'clock and ten minutes when I went to my room. I am sure of this, because Jessig was on his way to Hiram's cottage, and,

thinking he was late, asked me for the time. I am very particular about it, because I want you to understand the case in all its bearings.

“There was no moon, but it was bright starlight, and I sat at the window for half an hour watching the particular stars with which I am familiar. There was Capella far away to the eastward, the Pleiades nearly overhead, and the pretty Dolphin well to the west, with the big square of Pegasus intrusively conspicuous. It is rather pleasant to look up at the sky night after night and recognize old acquaintances, and, as the seasons change, to watch one group drop below the horizon, while another lifts itself into view.

“I think I must have grown sleepy, but yet was not inclined to retire, for I was seated in my easy-chair — it is all upholstery, and fits into the angular surfaces of the body in a very admirable way — and that is the last I remember. Yes, I was certainly asleep. There can be no doubt whatever on that subject.

“I was wakened after a while, but the process of awakening was very gradual. I heard dimly the village church-bell strike, but was too drowsy to count the strokes. After a little, I became aware of a light in the room, and looking about—can you believe it?—found myself in the old library in my city home. In that library *we* had sat, she and he and I, he on my knee, or in his mother’s lap, or playing with his toys on the floor. This did not startle me in the least, for all remembrance of Woodbine was obliterated, and it was as though I had never left that home, so happy once, so lonely now.

“I not only saw a light, but felt a presence, though I was sure no one had entered, or, for that matter, could have done so, since the door was securely locked. Still, some one besides myself was certainly in that room. The light that filled it was as delicate as a faint perfume. It was the merest shadow of a light, a sort of phantom light, like that made by what is called a fairy lamp in a sick-room. The darkness was

gone, and I could see every article of furniture, even the figures in the rug, and yet the light was not light, but radiance, soft and mellow and strange.

“A light! And yet there was no fire in the grate, the gas was not burning, the street-lamps could cast no reflection of that kind, and the moon had not risen. Why I did not become excited I cannot say, but I did not. Like one under the influence of some potent drug, which steals away his power of motion but leaves his intellect bright and clear, I sat and mused, as entirely quiescent as though it were an everyday occurrence.

“A little later on, I was roused by a child's voice. I say roused, but it was more than that; I was startled. I felt my face flush and the blood pour through my veins like a torrent which has burst the flood-gates that confined it. A child's voice! Yes, but that was not all. I distinctly recognized it as the voice of

my little Gooby. Turning around to the spot whence it seemed to come, a sight greeted me which no pen can fitly describe. My temples throb as I recall it, and I gasp for breath. There, within ten feet of me, on the rug in front of the fireplace, stood my boy, my soul's desire, my own dear Gooby. I instinctively made an effort to rush to him and fold him to my heart, but a thousand, yes, a million most attenuated threads held me to the chair, and, struggle as I would, I could not move. Round about him, apparently radiating from him, was the light I had noticed, and which filled the room. His face, oh, how beautiful it was! My boy, and yet not mine. The same as in the olden time, and yet not quite the same. It was Gooby, but the angel, not the mortal, Gooby.

“I can't tell you—for, though I have wrenched my memory in the task of recalling that part of the incident, I have as yet been unsuccessful—I can't tell you whether he really

talked with me and I really answered him, or whether it was a silent transmission of his thought to my mind and of my thought to his. For the time being it seemed as though I heard his voice, and spoke in return with mine.

“‘Papa!’ Was it a whisper? It filled the room, and yet I remember thinking that no one could have heard it but myself.

“‘Papa!’ A second time I made an effort to rise, but could not do it.

“Then with his little hand he pointed to the left. Nothing there! No, nothing. But see! While I looked, a new vision broke upon me. A brighter light shone around, but misty, as when seen through many folds of a white veil, and in its midst — poor heart, why did you not burst? — stood Clara, my wife, the mother of my boy! The gushing tears ran down my cheeks as I held out my trembling hands, imploring her to come nearer, for I could not stir. I was held back by an unseen but powerful agency.

“ ‘Would you have us return?’

“Whence came those words? From *her* lips? But her lips did not move. And yet I heard the words as plainly as though spoken in my ear.

“I could not answer, for a struggle was going on in my soul which drove me to destruction. Would I, if I could, have them back? What! Call those white-robed angels from a home wherein they lived the eternal life in the dear companionship of the redeemed, in communion with Him who said, ‘I will be with you always, even to the end of the world’? Call them back to this dingy earthly home, which, though it seemed so beautiful before, now seemed so unworthy of their occupancy?

“The conflict was over at last. My selfish sorrow for their loss was forced to retreat. My grief for my own affliction was swallowed up in my gratitude that they were beyond the reach of tears and sighs. ‘I have been all wrong,’ I said to my heart, ‘wrong, a thousand times

wrong. I have thought of my own loneliness, but not of their happiness. It has been nothing but self, self, self.'

"All this while Clara was looking intently at me, as though seeking an answer to the question, and all this while the air was vibrating with the words, 'Would you have us return?'

"I could bear the ordeal no longer. My better nature won the victory, and I cried out, though there was agony in my voice, 'No, dear ones. God's will, not mine, be done!'

"Then Clara smiled, and an ineffable sense of happiness filled my soul.

"But soon the mother and the child, casting on me looks of love, held their hands out as though inviting me to come with them, and then slowly, slowly faded from my view, leaving only a sigh behind.

"As the last glimpse of them was lost I woke.

"What would you think if that had happened to you? If it is a mere delusion, it is more

cruel than the point of a spear; but if it is a symbol of the truth, I can whistle all my doubts down the wind, and face whatever comes, with sweet anticipation of meeting them on the shore of immortality.

“Do you wonder that I am excited? Give me, then, O world, give me your prayers and your pity, that I may find the clue, and come safely out of my darkness into the sunshine of this glorious faith.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE CLUB ADJOURNS.

WE held our last meeting on the evening of February 29th. On the 20th the Master had gone back to the city, quite recovered in health, but he returned for this occasion, which was in celebration of Hiram Golf's birthday. "Sixty-three," said Hiram, cheerily, "and almost within hailin' distance of the other shore." His words were prophetic, for twelve months later he arrived in heaven.

I ought to say that I had formed a close friendship with Peter Van Brunt, and have never seen so marvelous a change in any man as that which took place in him. Not in his physical condition, for that was very far beyond hope when he first came to Woodbine, and had steadily and slowly grown worse. His mal-

ady walked about on slippered feet, and with that portentous cunning which is the strategy of a fatal disease had stolen noiselessly nearer and nearer to the source of life. But he had grown light-hearted, or almost so, and the smile which I frequently noticed on his lips was that of a soul waiting serenely and patiently for its release.

His words were buoyant and cheery, like those of one who anticipates a pleasure but does not feel quite at liberty to speak of it. More than once, as I looked in his pale face, I recalled the words of Buffon: "Death is not so terrible a thing as we imagine it to be. It is a specter that frightens us at a distance, and disappears as we approach it." I could see that with Van Brunt the dread had been overcome, and he was looking forward with something like eagerness to that dark threshold over which he would step into the embrace of wife and child.

Our talk at this meeting was rather desultory. We chatted on a large variety of topics, and

roamed at will over the whole territory of the religious life.

“A prayer,” began Hiram, “is a very cur’us thing. It is either good for everythin’, or it ain’t good for nothin’. There is a good deal of prayin’ that ain’t wuth the time it takes to do it, for the reason that there ain’t no meanin’ to it. If my boy was to talk to me as some folks talk to God, I should feel ashamed of him, and of myself. If a man prays as a privilege, he’ll get good out of it; if he prays as a duty, and becos he’s afraid not to, he insults his own religious natur’. When I was young, I darsn’t go to bed without sayin’ my prayers, for fear the bogies would carry me off; so I rattled the prayer off just as quick as I could, and then slipped between the sheets, with the feelin’ that God couldn’t make no complaint. I take it that there’s lots of prayers that ain’t got liftin’ power enough to take ’em up to the throne; and God don’t pay no attention to a prayer unless the man that makes it is in earnest

about it. What I believe in isn't the night-time prayer, partic'larly, nor the mornin' prayer, specially, but the all-day prayer."

"The thought that you always have a Friend within reach," added the Master, "is a solace and comfort. To realize that fact, and to conduct your life in accordance with it, is to attain the ideal life. Talking to God at a distance, and doubting whether He hears, or, if He hears, whether He will care enough to answer, is of very little spiritual value; but talking to Him as we would to a very wise man whose opinion is to decide our course of action, that is helpful and inspiring."

"Dear Master," said Van Brunt, "it would be interesting to know how often you pray, and for what things you pray, and especially, perhaps, for what things you do not think it well to pray. I beg you to believe that I am not simply curious, but seeking instruction."

"'Pray without ceasing' is the Apostle's injunction," broke in Jessig.

"But one cannot spend all his time in prayer," I suggested.

"Not all his time," answered the Master, "in uttering the words of prayer — the Apostle had no such meaning in his mind — but all his time in the spiritual attitude of prayer. Take counsel of God in every new endeavor, of whatever nature, whether it involve business or pleasure. Whatever a man feels it right and proper to do, on that he should reverently ask a blessing. And he certainly would, if he had a correct idea of his relations to the Most High. It is a grave mistake to suppose that the Father is only interested in your spiritual development. He put us here to do a certain amount of worldly work, and to do it according to our best judgment. That work is closely related to human progress, whether it is making shoes, or preaching sermons, or running a woolen mill. And we are taught that over all these things there is a watchful providence, which means that God wants them done in His way, and

not after the methods of avarice and selfishness. We are bound, therefore, to consult Him, for, after all, it is His world, and not ours. It is not necessary to put your prayer into a set form of speech, or to assume any particular physical attitude, for the heart can pray though the lips be silent, and God understands the unspoken as well as the uttered wish."

"I see, I see it all," chimed in Hiram, in cheery tones. "Supposin' a king should send for me and say, 'Hiram, there's a little job out there in that corner of my kingdom, and you are just the man to do it. It's not for your benefit partic'larly, but for the benefit of every one in that section. Now understand, Hiram, it isn't an easy job, but rather a tough one, and you'll get perplexed a good many times. Here'—and he hands me a document—'here are the general principles on which I want it done; but when you get mystified, don't hesitate to drop me a line statin' the difficulty, and I'll answer by return mail.' So I go out there, and

begin work. But soon I find that what the king called 'general principles' don't give me the light I need. Whenever I get stuck, I say to myself, 'I don't know about that, Hiram; you'd better write and get some advice.' And every day as I'm doin' that work, I say, 'I wonder how the king will like that?' or, 'I guess he'll be pleased when he sees what I've done to-day,' or, 'Well, now, I've got to confess that I made a blunder, and I'll just write and tell him so, and ask him to excuse it.' Now I should call that sort of thing prayin' without ceasin'. It's droppin' a line to heaven to tell the Lord how things is gettin' on."

"Master," said Jessig, "if the club will excuse me for changing the subject, I should like to relate an experience I had yesterday afternoon, and ask your opinion as to the reflections which afterward forced themselves on my mind."

We nodded our approval, and he went on: "I went to see Nancy Hobbs, who has just

passed her ninety-fourth year. The poor creature is in the last stages of physical feebleness. The whole machinery seems to be working with hesitation, and an evident feeling that its legitimate work was long since done. But her mind stands out from the wreck of matter like a star hovering over a ruin. It has apparently lost nothing of its old clearness, for she has been a remarkable woman. She is partly blind and partly deaf, and lingers, lingers on the threshold, waiting for the summons to take the next step. 'If the Lord were only willing!' she said to me, while the tears trickled down her furrowed cheeks. When I came away, I thought that after a certain period life is wholly undesirable, and that, in our human judgment, it is better to go than stay. What think you?"

"It is sometimes a privilege to die," answered the Master, in mellow tones, "and it is sometimes a duty to live. If there is no more to be done, we should be ready to go. An aged person, or a person suffering from an incurable

disease, however, may have a very important ministry. Such a one cannot go until the opportunity to do the prescribed work is either used or fatally neglected. I knew a mother who was bedridden for a score of years, and no one could tell why she didn't die, neither the physician nor she herself. But it was impossible. She longed for the release which did not come. But while on her bed she drew her two boys to Christ, and within a week from the time when they knelt at her side and prayed, she closed her eyes and went to heaven.

“We must serve God in the way He sees fit, and not in the way we deem most desirable. One may seem to be long over-due in heaven, if we count by years; but yet the hour does not strike because the plan of Providence has not been carried out.

“It is an affliction to stay after one's powers are worn out, but, like other afflictions, it is to be borne with resignation. It is a great grief to have your loved ones go, but an equal grief,

under certain circumstances, not to be able to go yourself."

"This clutching at life is abnormal, and indicates a diseased state of mind," I ventured to suggest. "Men overestimate the value of life by the failure to recognize the possibilities of the future. They refuse to believe that this life is not all, that if they have anything worth taking into the other world they will be heartily welcomed there and enjoy an environment which is far beyond the reach of their present power of conception."

"True, true," broke in Hiram. "I have known a man to live ten year just becoss he was afraid to die. It is like a poor tramp that come by my shop one muddy day. His shoes was about gone—down at the heel, great slits in the sides of 'em, and the soles was worn clean through in two places. I told Marthy to hunt up a pair of mine; and when she brought 'em, I said to him, 'Now throw them old ones over the fence, and put on this nice pair.' And do

you know, he didn't believe me — thought I was jokin', or was goin' to cheat him, and it's a positive fact he trudged off through the slush with his wet feet. So God says, 'Let that old body go, and I'll give you one that'll fit your soul as though 'twas made for it,' but we don't believe it, and keep the old worn-out body until it drops to pieces and we *have* to move out."

"There is an old Arabic legend of the prophet Enoch," said Jessig, "which seems to be pertinent to this discussion.

"After the prophet had spent many years in prayer, the Angel of Death came to him, saying that he wished to make a compact of friendship. He added that Enoch might prefer any request, and it would be granted.

"The first petition was that the angel would take his soul. He was perhaps wearied with too much living amid limitations, and, being sure of another life, naturally longed for it. The angel, however, declared that it was im-

possible to grant such an unusual request until God should see fit to give the order, and that the order would not be given until the appointed work had been accomplished.

“After some time, Enoch asked the angel to permit him to go to paradise. Azrael replied that this was a difficult wish to gratify, and that the special consent of the All-Merciful was necessary. The consent seems, however, to have been given after some delay, and Enoch presented himself at the gate. The keeper at first refused peremptorily to allow him to enter, but the order was not to be disobeyed. With a good deal of reluctance, and not without wonder that a mortal who had not yet tasted of death should be granted so great a privilege, he unbarred the gate, but gave Enoch this warning: ‘Go in, and behold paradise; but be speedy and leave it again, for thou mayest not dwell there till after the resurrection.’

“Enoch entered, but was in no haste to leave. Indeed, after he had been there for

some hours he felt it impossible to tear himself away. The thought of going back to the severe and irksome tasks of other days was very repugnant, and he determined that nothing should make him consent to depart. When urged to go, he replied, 'I am come to paradise, and this is my home; God has promised it to me, and now that I have entered I will leave it no more.'

"The dispute between the gate-keeper and Enoch waxed hot, so the legend says; but Enoch appealed to God not to send him back again to the lower world after having permitted him to see the glories of heaven, and the All-Merciful granted that petition also, and the prophet has dwelt in paradise ever since."

"I have entire sympathy with Enoch," remarked the Master. "It would have been almost cruel, nothing less than a punishment, to send him back. The world is full of beauty, with its blue skies and floating clouds, its singing rivers and surging ocean, and one stands

in the presence of created things with speechless amazement; but — I say it reverently — the Almighty did not reach the limit of possibility in such a place as this. The poorest room in the king's palace may astonish us, but it is not to be compared to the grand salon in which he receives his guests. Your story is very significant, for it means that God must not let us view heaven too plainly if we are to remain contentedly on the earth. We see its glories dimly, therefore, and through the thinly woven veil of our doubts, or our misgivings, or our instinctive shrinking from change, and so plod on, sometimes cheerily and sometimes wearily, like the traveler in a dark night, who doesn't know that at the very next turn in the road he will suddenly see the illuminated Home that he has been taught is his destination."

"There is another matter which we have only mentioned casually during the winter," said Van Brunt, "namely, what is called the miraculous portion of Christianity — those stu-

pendous acts of Christ which have startled every new generation of readers. Until lately I have regarded them as a romantic element interwoven with the general story—a sort of literary tribute paid to the exceptional career and teaching of the Nazarene. I think a great many people mentally halt at the recital of each one of them, but, finding it so desirable to accept the rest, pass them lightly by.”

“It is dangerous,” replied the Master, “to limit the possible, especially when you are dealing with the works of God. The word ‘miracle’ has been the bugbear of men who only think that they think; but an hour’s investigation shows that everything is a miracle—the creation of the universe, the act of setting the stars and the systems of stars in their places and tracing in infinite space the circuits they are to describe, the planting of a seed, with the command to transmute itself into a rose-bush. The man who for the first time should see a seed pass through the different stages of evolu-

tion, till the bud spread its petals and became a perfect flower, would not be more astonished than the Hebrews were when they saw Lazarus come out of his tomb. Miracle is simply the natural action of a law with which we are unacquainted. It is possible and proper either to say that everything is miracle or that nothing is miracle."

"I've thought on that subject a good deal," remarked Hiram, "but it don't trouble me no more. I say to myself, 'If you can find such a bein' as Christ, you would naterally expect Him to do just such things as is told of Him.'"

"Yes," said I, "the man who lives in the first story of the house and does things in his first-story way would be surprised if the man who lives on the second story, and who has a wider range of knowledge, should go down to the first story and do what he does as a matter of course upstairs. And if the man on the third story should come down two flights, and do what is usual with him when on the higher

level, the tenant on the first floor would think it all miraculous. When Christ came from heaven, He acted in accordance with the higher laws to which He had been accustomed. The angels who looked down on what was done in Judea were not at all astonished, neither would they speak of those wonderful acts as miracles; but to the men who saw them done, to the men who were living on a lower plane, they were simply astounding. If I read the Scriptures aright, Christ, who worked the miracles, was the only one who did not regard them as miracles. Perhaps, however, I am overstating the facts."

"Not at all," broke in Jessig. "On the contrary, your statement of the case is fair and impartial. I have sometimes thought that Jesus was Himself surprised that His audience should regard His works as miraculous in our sense of the word. I think I detect something of this astonishment in that remarkable passage, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on

Me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to My Father.' ”

“ And why,” broke in Van Brunt, “ why ‘ because I go to My Father ’ ? ”

“ I don't wish to seem intrusive in giving my interpretation,” answered Jessig, “ but I think the words are among the most magical in the New Testament. What can they mean except that if Christ had been permitted to remain longer on the earth even these wonderful works would seem like the rudimentary elements of His possibilities? He could do other works far greater, but the Father called Him, and He had no time. But if one believes in Him—that is, if one has the Christ spirit—that man will some time do these ‘ greater works ’ which Christ would have done Himself if His ministry had extended over thirty years instead of three.”

“ You have opened the door for very wide discussion,” said the Master, “ and I wish we could meet as a club many times more, that

we might reverently explore it. The time will come—I know not when, I only know that God is patient—the time will come when a regenerated race will cease to question the miracles, because their repetition will become a part of human history. ‘According to thy faith be it done unto thee,’ He said, and the sick man was suddenly restored. We have here not a contradiction of law, but something that is above law as we know it. The principle announced holds good, and will always do so. It is a man’s faith that makes him whole, and the word ‘whole,’ you know, means hale, or healthy. That being so, there shall be perfect wholeness where there is perfect faith. Sickness will be dissipated, and the physical character of life changed, when we come to be at one with God. Those prophesied days are not for you or me, but we shall look down from the battlements on a world redeemed, and therefore a world that is whole, or hale, in body, mind, and soul.”

"I know it is late," cried Hiram, in some excitement, "but I couldn't get a wink to-night if I didn't shout Amen! I've read that piece of Scriptor a hunderd times, and every time I said to myself, 'Hiram, the meanin' is as plain as your lapstone.' But I never said it even to my Marthy, becos it seemed so like a wonderful dream, and she would sartinly tell me I was in my second childhood. But just think of it! Believin' in Christ, and bein' whole! Ain't that it, parson?"

Jessig nodded, and Hiram, who was glowing with fervor, went on:

"All Christ's, and all healthy. No rheumatism, no disease of no kind! And not becos we've found a herb or a drug for every ill, but becos we have knelt on the ground as the Christ passed by, and touched the hem of His garment!"

Just then dear Mrs. Jessig appeared, with a smile on her face, bearing the coffee-urn. We sipped the delicious beverage for a while, chatted

about our personal prospects, expressed the fervent hope that we might meet again, and then shook hands like old friends, and went out into the bright starlight with hearts full of good cheer.

The Fireside Club had adjourned *sine die*.

CHAPTER X.

HEAVEN AT HAND.

“ MARCH 16th. Here I am in the old city home once more. Home! No, it can never again be that for me, since it is not that for *them*. While they were here it was indeed the happiest place on earth; but where they are is my real home. I recall a fragment of an old Persian poem of the thirteenth century :

“ ‘ Tell me, gentle traveler, thou
Who hast wandered far and wide,
Seen the sweetest roses blow
And the brightest rivers glide—
Say, of all thine eyes have seen,
Which the fairest land has been?’ ”

“ How often have I quoted these lines to Clara, and how often have her eyes half filled with tears as I repeated the poet's answer :

“ ‘ Lady, shall I tell thee where
Nature seems most blessed and fair,
Far above all climes beside?
'Tis where those we love abide ;
And that little spot is best
Which the loved one's foot hath pressed.’

“ Yes, I am back again, but what a different ‘I’ I am. I can’t recognize my face, or my thoughts, or my feelings. I looked into the mirror to-day—the mirror that stands in *her* room, in *our* room—and was struck by the wonderful and happy change that has come over me. Indeed, there seemed to be two faces reflected there, one in the background, projected by my imagination, and one in the foreground. The former was of myself as I was when I went to Woodbine last October, the other was of my present self. The face in the background was haggard, with black lines under the eyes, the forehead deeply furrowed by the terrible experiences through which I have passed, and the expression—ah me! I shuddered as I beheld it, it was so stern, so hard, so defiant.

The face in the foreground was that of a man who has suddenly fallen upon a fortune and begun to enjoy it. It was a happy face, and—I can confess it to these pages—a resigned face.

“Isn’t it strange that an idea can work such a metamorphosis? That is all that has occurred—a change in my way of looking at things. In October I looked, but saw nothing! Now, in March, I look, and see more than I can speak of. That is all the difference. All? It is infinite. Midnight has become midday, despair has become faith, the lead of fear has been transmuted into the gold of hope. I am another man—not the Van Brunt who buried his dear ones in the grave, but the Van Brunt whose dear ones are beckoning him to join them in heaven.

“March 20th. I used to dread to stay in this old house, because every room, every picture, every piece of furniture, even the ringing of the door-bell, reminded me of them, and

that memory was prolonged agony. Now I like the place, and for the very reason which before made me hate it. I don't think I am superstitious, and yet I feel their presence constantly. It seems as though they were not far away. When I am downstairs they are perhaps upstairs, and when I am upstairs they are perhaps downstairs. I feel that if I should call they might answer me. I was two hours in our sitting-room this afternoon, in the same easy-chair I used so many years. How still it was, the silence only broken by the measured ticking of the old Dutch clock in the hallway. Right opposite me was the demi-sofa on which Clara sat while I read to her evening after evening. And I was happy there, placidly happy, perfectly quiescent, as though some one had said, 'Wait a bit, and you shall see her!' The old restlessness is gone forever.

"At one moment, however, I came near breaking down. Looking about the room, my eyes fell on something under the piano. I

rather wonder it has never been taken away. Perhaps the aged housekeeper, who is a dear soul, let it stay there for old times' sake. It was the little two-wheeled cart, one of the belongings of Gooby. He used to trundle it about the room, chuckling to himself the while. I couldn't help the shiver that went through me. Those blessed days came back with a rush like the waters of a river when the dam breaks, and I lost control of myself. But after a little the pain was gone, and I grew calm again. 'What is he doing now?' I asked. 'Is he as joyous in the heavenly as he was in the earthly childhood?' And the sunshine stealing through the window seemed to answer, 'Yes.'

"March 25th. Dr. Franklin came to-day for the first time. He was called to Washington soon after my return, and only got back yesterday. One of the Cabinet had a severe attack of pneumonia, and as Franklin is an expert in the disease, he was naturally summoned. I don't think any man was ever more surprised

than he when he saw how cheerful I was. He examined me with great care, and all the while I noticed the puzzled look on his face. I think he was trying to find somewhere in my system the cause for my good spirits. For full five minutes he maintained a stubborn silence, like a man who is trying to solve an enigma, and then he said, casually :

“ ‘Van Brunt, it was lucky I sent you to Woodbine.’

“ ‘Very,’ I replied, heartily.

“ ‘What more to say, or how to continue the conversation, he didn’t know.

“ ‘It was the best prescription you ever wrote,’ I said.

“ ‘H’m! Yes?’ he answered, as though expecting some revelation, but what it could be was beyond his ken.

“ ‘The medicine?’ he began.

“ ‘Did me no good,’ I replied.

“ ‘The air?’ he asked.

“ ‘It was fresh and pure,’ I answered, ‘but

it came too late. I am no better, but gradually growing worse.'

"He saw that I was under no illusion, and that puzzled him still more. Indeed, he sat and simply stared at me.

"I found something in Woodbine, doctor,' I said.

"'Ah!' and he lifted his eyebrows.

"'Yes, something that has made a new man of me,' I went on.

"'May I ask what it is, Van?'

"'A Saviour!' was my reply.

"Franklin is a materialist. He has dissected many bodies in the hope of finding a soul, and been so unsuccessful that he can't believe there is one. There may have been a sneer in his heart at my words, for aught I know, but he was too courteous to let me see it. He merely sank back in his chair and gazed at me in wonder.

"'Yes,' I said, 'I found a Saviour there, and, as you see, I am facing the inevitable without

a fear. I am happy, doctor—more happy than I can tell you.'

"So I talked with him for half an hour. He listened respectfully, seemed interested in parts of my recital, and when I had finished heaved a sigh, but what it meant I cannot say.

" 'To lean on a strong arm at such a time as this,' I said, 'is a great privilege. To have that in one's heart which can make him bear his burden cheerfully may well excite one's gratitude.'

" 'True, Van Brunt,' he answered, with considerable feeling. 'We doctors are not apt to be religious men, but if religion has effected this change in you, my dear boy, I wish there were more of it in the world.'

"As he was about leaving, I said, 'Doctor, I am much more feeble than when I saw you last.'

"He nodded.

" 'I should like to have you tell me plainly,' I went on, 'when I may expect to —'

" 'Oh,' he answered, evasively, 'length of life

is the unknown quantity. Everything is uncertain.'

" 'Not death,' I broke in.

" He made no reply.

" 'There are matters, business matters, I would like to attend to, and —'

" 'Well, it might be prudent to do it, at your convenience, within the next three months.'

" 'Must I wait so long, doctor?' I said.

" 'Are you in earnest, Van Brunt?' he asked, and gave me a searching look.

" 'I hoped it might be sooner,' I replied. 'When one's trunks are packed for a journey, it is irksome to be told that the train is an hour late.'

" 'My dear fellow,' he continued, 'if this is what you call religion, I shouldn't object to having some of it for myself. I see you are strong, and I may as well be entirely candid. If I understand your symptoms, the change which you don't seem to fear, but which you are apparently anticipating —'

“ ‘ Yes, yes,’ I broke in, inquiringly.

“ ‘ May come now at any time.’

“ I couldn’t help smiling as I held out my hand and replied, ‘ Thank you, doctor.’

“ Franklin has a big heart, and I wish he also had that something which makes me so happy.

“ March 28th. I couldn’t write in my diary yesterday. My hand trembled, and there was such a fluttering inside that I was restless all day.

“ March 29th. A bad night.

“ March 30th. Clara! Gooby!”

CHAPTER XI.

GOOD-NIGHT.

MY story comes to an end. There is little more to be said, but that little, like the key-stone of an arch, is important. I heartily wish I could bring it to a close with joyous laughter, but that is impossible. Perhaps, however, I can do even better than that, and leave with my readers the consciousness of a great victory. So far as Van Brunt is concerned, it was the grandest victory a human soul ever achieves. When he went to Woodbine he was like one who rages, but when he bade us good-by there were tears in his smiles and smiles in his tears. So weak was he that we all sighed, but so happy was he that we wondered and thanked God. When I said good-night to Jessig on that last evening, he whispered, softly, referring to Van Brunt, "God's presence is a wonderful thing."

The whole expression of the man's face had changed. He was no longer the Van Brunt who bore his burden with clenched teeth, but the Van Brunt who had been healed of his wounds by the Great Physician.

He very seldom talked about his religion; he had too much of it to do that. It filled his soul so full that his lips were dumb, first with astonishment and then with gratitude. I have noticed in a somewhat extended experience that slender piety is apt to be garrulous, while profound consecration is satisfied to find its vent in good deeds. Even at The Fireside Club Van Brunt was generally the silent member. He would graciously drop a hint of the change that was going on within him, but it was like the throbbing of the chrysalis when the grub has become a butterfly and is just ready to try its wings.

We were troubled about him at the beginning of the season, for he evidently suffered acutely; but before we adjourned he had found

what he sought, what only God could give, and was supremely happy. The sun had risen over the hill-tops and the mists had disappeared. He saw beyond the horizon of earth, and caught a glimpse of the Celestial City. His mental and emotional attitude had altered his whole outlook. Gloom and despair had given way to hope, and hope had brightened to certainty.

When we parted I expected to see him in the autumn, but I saw him much sooner. The three letters which I received I have preserved as souvenirs of friendship, but the handwriting in the last one shows that the body was too feeble to respond to the soul. It was no longer vigorous, but tremulous, and I laid it by with a pang in my heart.

If I could have spared the time I should have gladly taken a run to town for a day or two's visit, but business is inexorable, and we were very much pressed at the mills. Our contracts were heavy, and it behooved us to keep on the

watch, for we were running night and day with a double set of hands. It is not strange, therefore, that I was absorbed in my duties almost to the point of forgetfulness; but on the 6th of April the clerk handed me a telegram just as I was hanging up my coat and getting ready for a hard day's work. It was from the Master, and contained these words:

"Van Brunt has asked for you. Come quickly, or you may be too late."

For a moment I was stunned. I must have grown pale, for the clerk said, in startled tones, "Shall I fetch you a glass of water, sir?" and then quickly added, "I hope you have no bad news." That brought me to myself, and with a hasty "Thank you, it's all right," I went to the counting-room and told Mr. Phil my story. He instantly gave me leave of absence, and in thirty minutes I was on the train.

I cannot describe the scene at Van Brunt's house. He not only recognized me, but pressed

my hand, smiled, and whispered, "Almost there !"

The next day he was permitted to talk for a few minutes, but Dr. Franklin stood by to put an end to the interview whenever his patient showed signs of weariness. Van Brunt, his voice broken, and at times scarcely audible, gave me certain directions about his affairs, which it is not necessary to repeat, and then asked me to open the second drawer of his secretary and fetch a book. It was the diary, which had been his only confidant during the winter months.

"It is to be destroyed," he said, huskily.

"My dear friend," I suggested, "this is the record of a remarkable experience and a remarkable triumph. There are others, poor wanderers, who have lost their way in the wilderness, and who would be glad to know how you were rescued. If you found the light, it is possible that your words may lead them also

to the light. The book shall be destroyed if you think best ; but if it can be made a guide and a help — ” and then I stopped.

He lay with closed eyes, evidently thinking. At last he turned, and said :

“ You think so ? ”

“ I do indeed,” I replied.

“ But parts are so personal,” he whispered.

“ True, and these shall be burned. But other parts may give good cheer to struggling souls.”

Still there was hesitation. But in a moment he had reached a conclusion, and as I took his thin hand in mine, he said :

“ As you choose ; only do for me as I would do for you.”

I promised, and he immediately fell asleep. I crept out of the room on tiptoe, with these precious pages, which have torn my heart in the reading, and extracts from which I have ventured to make public.

The next morning the Master called on me. What is there in coming events, that they

should tell their secret before a word has been spoken? I knew by the measured footsteps of the dear old man, by the calm expression of his eyes, what had happened.

“Van Brunt?” I asked.

He nodded.

“He is dead?”

I shall never forget the look the Master gave me. It was laden with quiet rebuke, and I felt ashamed.

“No, not dead, but gone to heaven. His last words were, ‘My wife! My child!’ and there was a smile on his lips. He was glad to go. Our dear friend Van Brunt is at Home.”

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